

The Berserker



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The animal warriors of the North from the Vendel to the
Viking Age



TRADITION

Foreword

This study is a revised version of a dissertation accepted at the University of Lille in 2008 and published in France in 2011.

Special thanks are due to Prof. Wilhelm Heizmann who, in consultation with the late Prof. Heinrich Beck, on the occasion of a lecture on the Old Norse Berserkir at the Institute for Nordic Philology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in May 2012, asked the author to have this book translated with the aim of including it in the series of supplementary volumes to the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*.

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Table of contents

Foreword V

Abbreviations XI

Introduction 1

A	The tradition of Snorri Sturluson	1
B	<i>Haraldskvæði</i>	4
C	War and the sacred	6
D	Etymological questions and delimitation of the topic	8
E	Typology of sources	10
F	Methodological principles	15

Chapter I State of
research

21

A	The early research approaches	22
B	From Sveinbjörn Egilsson to Hermann Güntert	26
C	The era of controversy	30

Chapter II

Etymological interpretation of the appellatives *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn* 43

A	Etymological study of the appellative <i>úlfheðinn</i>	43
B	The controversial etymology of the appellative <i>berserkr</i>	48
1	The first interpretations	48
2	The "classic" interpretation based on the adjective <i>berr-</i> (<i>nudus</i>)	50
3	The etymon <i>*ber-</i> (<i>ursus</i>) and Sveinbjörn Egilsson's interpretation	52
4	The controversy	58
C	From "bear shirt" to "fierce warrior"	65
1	The thesis of the semantic shift	65
2	Conclusion of the etymological study	69

Chapter III

The berserkers in the Skaldic and Eddic sources: *Haraldskvæði* and other poems 73

A	The formation of <i>Haraldskvæði</i> : stages of a reconstruction	74
---	---	----

- B The fragments of *Haraldskvæði*: an examination of the Old Norse written tradition 83

VIII Table of contents

1	The text of the <i>Fagrskinna</i>	83
2	The text of the <i>Heimskringla</i>	95
3	The text of the <i>Flateyjarbók</i>	100
C	The <i>Haraldskvæði</i> and the beast warriors: the value of tradition	102
D	Other Eddic and Skaldic sources	111
1	Contents of the verses	112
2	Dating of the verses	114

Chapter IV

The berserkers in Norway at the time of the Battle of Hafrsfjord: the tradition of *Íslendingasögur* 117

- A The *Vatnsdæla saga* (Chapter IX) 117
- B The *Grettis saga* (Chapter II) 121
- C The *Egils saga* (Chapter IX) 122
- D The social status of animal warriors 123
- E The hereditary nature of the phenomenon: a genealogy of animal warriors 128

Chapter V

Trance and the memory of werewolves in the *Egils saga* 133

- A The physical characteristics of the animal warriors 133
- B *Berserksgangr* and werewolf traits 139

Chapter VI

The berserkers and Odin's mythology: the tradition of Snorri Sturluson 153

- A The transformations Óðinn in the *Heimskringla* 153
- B Snorri Sturluson's description of the *berserksgangr* 154
- C Óðinn, god of animal warriors: confirmation of Snorri's tradition 157

Chapter VII

The literary figure of the berserker and his stereotypes in the Icelandic sagas 169

- A The figure of the berserker, variants and development 169
- 1 The elite warrior in the service of the powerful 170
- 2 The Viking and the Holmgang Man (*hólmgöngumaðr*) 179
- 3 "Exotic" figures and ominous creatures 190

4	The virtuous fighter	194
B	The characteristics of the <i>berserksgangr</i> and the vocabulary of transformation	195
1	The description of the <i>berserksgangr</i>	196
2	<i>Berserksgangr</i> and the vocabulary of transformation	212

Table of contents IX

Chapter VIII

	Þórir hundr and the last animal warriors in 11th century Norway	227
A	Examination of the sources	228
1	The report of the <i>Heimskringla</i>	231
2	The Legendary Saga Report	237
B	The figure of the beast warrior and the <i>interpretatio christiana</i>	240

Chapter IX

	Archaeological and epigraphic records	251
A	The motif of the wolf warrior	252
1	The matrices of Torslunda	252
2	The sword scabbard from Gutenstein and the bronze fragment from Obrigheim	264
3	The ring swords and the Germanic followers	273
B	The wearing of masks in the ancient Nordic world	286
1	The tradition before the Viking Age	286
2	The material of the Viking Age	292
C	Runic inscriptions	298

Summary	307
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Bibliography	313
Sources	313
Secondary literature	333

Register of sites	371
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Source index	373
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Abbreviation

adän.	Old Danish
ahd.	Old High German
ae.	Old English
air.	Old Irish
alam.	alamannic
an.	Old Norse
as.	Old Saxon
aschw.	Old Swedish
aslav.	Old Slavic
ASB	Old Norse saga library
BA	Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana
bair.	Bavarian
DR	Danmarks Runeindskrifter → Jacobsen / Moltke 1942
EA	Editiones Arnamagnæanæ
Flat	<i>Flateyjarbók</i> → Guðbrandr Vigfússon / Unger (ed.) 1860-1868
francon.	Franconian
FMS	<i>Formanna Sögur</i>
FSN	<i>Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda</i>
Germania	<i>Tacitus, Germania</i> → Perret (ed./trans.) 1997
got.	Gothic
Greek	Greek
HdA	Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens → Bächtold-Stäubli / Hoffmann-Krayer (ed.) 1927-1942
Hkr	<i>Heimskringla</i> → Finnur Jónsson 1893-1901
IED	<i>An Icelandic-English Dictionary</i> → Cleasby / Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957
ÍF	Íslensk fornrit
Indo-European	Indo-European
KHLNM	Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til → Brøndstedt et al. (eds.) 1956-1978
lat.	Latin
langob.	Lombard
mhd.	Middle High German
NGL	Norges gamle Love indtil 1387 → Keyser / Munch (ed.) 1846, 1848
LMIR	Late Medieval Icelandic Romances → Loth (ed.) 1962-1965
Ög	Östergötlands runinskrifter → Brate 1911/1918
ONP	Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog → Degnbol et al. 1989-2004
RGA	Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde → Beck et al. (ed.) 1973-2008
RGA-E	Supplementary volumes to the RGA
run.	runic
SPSMA	Scaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages
Skj.	Skjaldedigting → Finnur Jónsson (ed./trans.) 1908-1915
Sö	Södermanlands runinskrifter → Brate / Wessén 1924-1936
STUGNL	Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur
U	Upplands runinskrifter → Wessén / Jansson 1949-1951
urgerm.	Proto-Germanic
Vg	Västergötlands runinskrifter → Jungner / Svärdström 1940-1970

Introduction

A The tradition of Snorri Sturluson

Snorri Sturluson, who in his history of the Ynglings, the *Ynglinga saga*,¹ depicts the legendary origins of this royal dynasty, takes from the mythological heritage of the old North the material for a pseudo-historical account whose central figure is Óðinn. The god appears with the features of an important leader (*hofðingi*), who is simultaneously a great warrior (*hermaðr mikill*), a seer and a magician (*forspár ok fjölkunnigr*),² and who rules over a sanctuary (*blótstaðr*) located in *Ásgarð* with twelve "priests" (*hofgoðar*).³ Óðinn offers the men of his troop protection, especially in battle:

Óðinn kunni svá gera, at í orrostu urðu óvinir hans blindir eða daufir eða óttafullir, en vápn þeira bitu eigi heldr en vendir, en hans menn fóru brynjulausir ok váru galnir sem hundar eða vargar, bitu í skjöldu sína, váru sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar; þeir drápu mannfólkit, en hvárki eldr né járn orti á þá; þat er kallaðr berserksgangr.⁴

(Óðinn could cause his enemies to become blind or deaf or terrified in battle, and their weapons bit no more than rods. His men walked without breasts and were as fierce as dogs or wolves, they bit their shields, they

1 The *Ynglinga saga* is the first of a total of 16 sagas collected in the *Heimskringla* - a comprehensive work that describes the history of the kings of Norway up to the reign of Magnús Erlings-son (1156-1184). The medieval copyists referred to this collection of texts, which was written at the beginning of the 13th century, by various names (*Ævisaga Noregskonunga*, *Sögur Noregskonunga* etc.). The title of the *Heimskringla*, which adopted by the Swede Johan Peringskiöld for his *editio princeps* of 1697, is inspired by the first words of the *Ynglinga saga*: *kringla heimsins* (an expression derived from the Latin *orbis terræ*, "world circle"). The *Heimskringla* is traditionally attributed to the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241). The manuscripts that have come down to us do not mention any author by name; however, the first Danish translations - produced in the 16th century on now lost parchment - already refer to Snorri. Several medieval sources also present him as an authority the field of Norwegian historiography (cf. especially Whaley 1999, pp. 239-240).

2 *Ynglinga saga*, ch. V, p. 14.

3 *Ynglinga saga*, ch. II, p. 11. The reading *hofgoðar* occurs in the copies of the *Kringla* manuscript, which is considered a particularly faithful reproduction of the original text. It was written in Iceland around 1260 and was lost except for a single leaf (*Lbs frg* 82, now kept in the National Library of Reykja-vík) during the fire of Copenhagen in 1728. The text has survived thanks to transcriptions from the 17th and 18th centuries. The *Codex Frisianus* (*AM* 45 fol, first quarter of the 14th century) has preserved the reading *hofðingjar* ("chieftains"), together with *AM* 38 fol (copy from the end of the 17th century, partially transcribed from the manuscript *Jqfraskinna*, which also lost during the fire of 1728; this version of *Jqfraskinna* is referred to in modern editions with the abbreviation *J2*). For the *Heimskringla* manuscripts, see also the preface by Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1901, I, pp. I-VIII.

4 *Ynglinga saga*, chap. VI, p. 17 f.

were as strong as bears or bulls; they killed men, but neither fire nor iron could harm them; this is called *berserksgangr*).

The compound *berserksgangr*,⁵ often used in Icelandic prose literature,⁶ describes a state of frenzy originally attributed certain warriors of pagan Scandinavia: the *berserkr*.⁷ According to medieval tradition, these warriors cannot be wounded by swords or fire during their terrifying fits.⁽⁸⁾

This text by Snorri, written in the first half of the 13th century, is now regarded as a *locus classicus*. It has a profoundly original character: no other tradition combines the *furor berserkicus* with Odin's magic in the same explicit way.

This religious - or mythological - interpretation of the phenomenon still divides scholars today. Some Germanists - including Otto Höfler⁹ and Jan de Vries⁽¹⁰⁾ - have attributed both a cultic and a military function to the berserkers. In France, this discussion aroused the interest of Georges Dumézil. In his study of the "mythical aspects of the warrior function among the Indo-Germanic peoples", the comparatist has based his analysis of various Old Norse sources in particular on the paragraph of the *Ynglinga saga* quoted above.¹¹ Other scholars, however - among them Hans Kuhn¹² and Klaus von See⁽¹³⁾ - consider Snorri's reports to be mere fables and refuse to associate the existence of the animal warriors with an Óðinn cult. These philologists insist both on the purely legendary character of the first chapters of the *Ynglinga saga* and on the late date of the text after the advent of Christianity.

5 Literally: "gait of the berserker". The noun *gangr* can also be understood in the sense of "rapid or furious going" (cf. *IED*, p. 191). Cf. also the idiom *ganga berserksgang*. 6 Cf. the cited evidence in *ONP*, 2, p. 259 f.

7 Pl. of the subst. mask. *berserkr*.

8 Cf. among others the *Svarfdæla saga* (ch. VII, p. 142 f.) or the *Vatnsdæla saga* (ch. XLVI [Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 125]). For other evidence, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, pp. 332 ff. This question is explored in detail in chapter VII of the present work.

9 Höfler 1976, pp. 298-304.

10 de Vries 1970, 1, § 333-336.

11 Dumézil 1985, p. 208 f. Cf. also Dumézil 1939, pp. 79-91 (Chapter VI: Les guerriers-fauves).

12 Kuhn 1949; cf. also the revised version of this article, published in German under the title "Kämpfen und Berserker" was published in 1968.

13 Cf. von See 1961b; *IED*, p. 61, also doubts Snorri's position and suspects the author of the *Ynglinga saga* of paraphrasing the *Hávamál* (cf. especially line 156 of this poem). However, the tradition of the Eddic poem seems to confirm Snorri's position, without having to assume a direct borrowing.

Snorri himself also seems to distort the facts: He simultaneously describes Óðinn as the founder of a new Swedish kingdom¹⁴ and attributes to him heroic deeds that do not fit a historical figure, but do fit one of the highest gods of the Norse pantheon. This confusion of genres, which is quite common in medieval sources, can generate a certain skepticism. Does the author lose his credibility in the process? Should his work be definitively as a "mythological tale"? We know that Eugen Mogk included the *Edda*, but also the first chapters of the *Ynglinga saga*, in a literary genre that he called a "mythological novella"⁽¹⁵⁾. Dumézil has vividly disagreed with this view, seeing Snorri as a generally reliable witness.¹⁶ To what extent can we trust Snorri in this case? Divided between the claims of the Christian faith and his interest in the traditions of his ancestors, the Icelandic historian tries to reconcile the two points of view: He refers to legendary traditions connected to the divine ancestors and the Swedish origin of the Norwegian royal family⁽¹⁷⁾ while at the same time respecting the limits of *interpretatio christiana*. The conventions of his time forbade him to depict the pagan deities in their true nature.¹⁸ But Snorri's euhemerism does not necessarily diminish the value of his utterances. The author was probably inspired by an ancient mythical narrative tradition in the guise of historical tradition. In any case, the hypothesis of an uninterrupted tradition deserves to be examined more closely. Caution dictates that we should not immediately

14 The ancestor of *Ynglingar* is his successor Yngvi-Freyr, who does not belong to the Asen, but comes from the race of the Wanen.

15 Mogk 1923.

16 Dumézil 1992, p. 253 f. ("Réhabilitation de Snorri").

17 For Baetke 1964, p. 69 f., it is a "new" legend in the 12th century by Ari the Wise (*Ari inn fróði*) in his first version of the *Íslendingabók*. According to another hypothesis, which is often put forward, the motif of the divine ancestors of the *Ynglingar* is based on a pre-Christian tradition (cf. Sundqvist 2002; Sundqvist 2004b, p. 279 f.). It was partly that there were allusions to this mythical genealogy in the first - now lost - stanzas of the *Ynglingatal*. Regardless of the original form of this poem, which was probably written in the 9th century, Snorri undoubtedly only knew the fragments he quotes. This leads to the conclusion that he was inspired by other sources of information (cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 360 f., note 9). In addition, there are many examples of royal dynasties in the tradition of the Germanic peoples that are linked to a divine ancestor - usually Óðinn/Wotan. They are clearly proven among the Anglo-Saxons (cf. the article by Lutz von Padberg 2004, pp. 272 f.) and indirectly among the Germanic peoples of the continent, especially the Goths and the Lombards (cf. Höfler 1956; Höfler 1973b, pp. 18-29; Beck / Sauer / Scheibelreiter 1998; Anton et al. 2004, pp. 235-272).

18 In his *Edda*, Snorri still follows euhemeristic approaches, but in a less systematic way.

temptation to give in to hypercriticism: The beginning of the *Ynglinga saga* should not be hastily assigned to the realm of literary fantasy.

Certainly the use of the word *berserksgangr* is not documented in prose works before the 13th century.¹⁹ However, the berserkers are mentioned in a much older skaldic verse, which is quoted by Snorri in his *Haralds saga hárfagra*⁽²⁰⁾.

B *Haraldskvæði*

This verse comes from a fragment of a poem describing the Battle of Hafrsfjord, which took place on the coast of Norway around 872 AD. The medieval tradition names both Þórbjörn hornklofi and Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni - two skalds Haraldr hárfagris - as the authors of this fragment. The archaic style of the work makes it possible date it to around the end of the 9th century.

Based on a reconstruction from 1847, this fragment is combined with further stanzas and has since been included in most editions of skaldic poetry as part of a longer poem under the name *Haraldskvæði*⁽²¹⁾ ("Harald's Song"). However, this work does not appear in any medieval manuscript in the form reproduced by modern editions, which of 23 stanzas of various origins.²² The title *Haraldskvæði* is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Norse sources.

Outside the *Haralds saga hárfagra*, the verses referring to the battle in the Hafrsfjord appear in the *Fagrskinna*⁽²³⁾ (-) a chronicle that was probably written a little earlier than the *Heimskringla* - and in a later collection, the *Flateyjarbók*²⁴.

Two further stanzas, taken from another fragment now integrated into the *Haraldskvæði*, also mention the berserkers, who are presented as a group of elite fighters and followers of King Haraldr hárfagri.

19 This does not argue against the assumption that this word could be much older: The argument *ex silentio* is not always applicable to consider a term as a "late" creation. The oldest Scandinavian sources that predate the writing of the Icelandic sagas belong to Eddic or Skaldic poetry or to the Runic inscriptions; the works or inscriptions that have come down to us form a fairly limited corpus that uses a relatively stereotypical vocabulary.

20 *Haralds saga hárfagra*, Ch. XVIII, p. 124, Str. 52.

21 For the genesis and structure of this poem, see Chapter III below.

22 Cf. Würth 1999a.

23 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903, p. 16, Str. 9.

24 *Harald's þáttur hárfagra*, p. 574.

be. But the dating of this passage is controversial. Both stanzas, which are handed down in the *Fagrskinna*²⁵ and the *Flateyjarbók*⁽²⁶⁾ are not mentioned in Snorri's work.

Snorri Sturluson certainly did not invent the motif of animal warriors himself. Nevertheless, he is the only one who clearly refers to the berserkers as "Óðinnmen" (*hans menn*). Does Snorri echo a myth whose forms had no influence on the structure of Old Norse society? Or does the author of *Heimskringla*, on the contrary, recall a tradition that was actually reflected in certain cults and shaped the organization of followers in pre-Christian times? Are the berserkers just fictional characters or historically verifiable warriors?

The *Haraldskvæði* tradition supports the assumption that the Berserker were a historical phenomenon. In this case, it is not only reduced to a warlike practice, but also to a religious sphere, which is indicated by the connection to Óðinn.

The devastating frenzy to which the followers of the prince of the Asen indulge seems to fit into a cultic context. Does the reputation of invulnerability that these pagans enjoy correspond to the powers attributed to the god who provokes the ecstatic fighting excitement? Do these men see themselves as incarnations of mythical beings accompanying the god of the dead during their terrible fits of rage?

The medieval sources, which were written several centuries after the Christianization of Iceland, do not provide any direct, clear evidence in this regard. Therefore, the various theories on the origin of the *berserksgangr*, which were developed long after the fall of paganism, are based on very uncertain foundations. How can we confirm Snorri's statements, which, as seemingly isolated testimonies, can be methodically challenged?

Of the Old Norse sources available to Snorri, only the skaldic material has survived to this day. Since the *Haraldskvæði* a primary source, the use of this tradition is inevitable: it provides historically and geographically reliable starting points by the existence of the berserkers to a specific event (the Battle of Hafrsfjord). Research on this topic must therefore be based primarily on a critical examination of *Haraldskvæði* - which has not always been the case.

However, an analysis of this work is not sufficient to dispel all doubts. eliminate: The "Odin-like" character of the berserkers is not explicitly mentioned in the poem, which nevertheless contains some mythological allusions. Consider

25 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903, p. 11, Str. 12 f.

26 *Harald's þáttur hárfagra*, p. 568.

If all the texts that make up the *Heimskringla* are taken as a whole, the verses quoted *Harald's saga hárfagra* have no direct reference to the sixth chapter of the *Ynglinga saga*. It is therefore necessary to compare Snorri's testimony with other sources that pass on similar beliefs or related practices. These may be literary texts or archaeological material.

This approach will conclusive answers despite the methodological difficulties arising from the typological diversity of the sources. Not infrequently, these sources provide seemingly contradictory images or information that are difficult to verify - except indirectly, in the context of a comparative study.

But the task, however difficult it may be, is fully justified by the subject: The judgment of the credibility of Snorri Sturluson's tradition depends on it. His definition of the *berserksgangr* can shed decisive light on the close connections that existed in the beliefs of Old Norse paganism between numinous forces and warlike function.

C The war and the sacred

In Old Norse, the concept of "war" is expressed - among other words and phrases⁽²⁷⁾

by the negation *ú-friðr* ("hostilities", "clashes", literally "un-peace") formed with the prefix *ú-*.²⁸ The masculine noun *friðr* refers to the idea of peace, but also to personal security and invulnerability. The word is also associated with the idea of prosperity, as the ritual phrase *til árs ok friðar* ("good year and peace")²⁹ attests; in certain contexts it also has a religious connotation - as the expression *jólafríðr* ("Yule peace")³⁰ also suggests. In contrast, the word *ú-friðr* denotes the disturbance of a positive state. However, the Old Norse sources place a particularly high value on martial achievements and heroic behavior. Without specifically

27 Cf. Sturtevant 1941, p. 260.

28 The expression appears both in skaldic poetry and in prose texts - e.g. in this passage of the *Hákonar saga góða* (ch. X, p. 179): *ófriðr var millum Danmerkr ok Nóregs*. *Úfriðr* also survives as a personal name or byname in the Swedish runic inscriptions (inscriptions U 1118, Örke stone, and M 15, Skön church stone).

29 For an interpretation of this formula, see Hultgård 2003.

30 Cf. also the attribute *friðsæll* ('favored by peace'), which is used in connection with the Mythic ruler *Fjölfnir* in the *Ynglinga saga* (ch. XI, p. 24).

In order to be "sacred", war, which is very often associated with rituals and mythological beliefs, brings about the intervention of divine powers - just like other human activities. In a world where one can rarely assert oneself through purely peaceful means, the martial act represents a privileged means of expressing personal worth: it allows one to fulfill one's destiny and achieve fame and fortune. Bravery undoubtedly attracts attention and recognition in a society in which masculine virtues are highly valued. Even if strength of character, eloquence, skill and self-control often triumph over brute force in the saga tradition, the excitement of battle, fueled under certain circumstances by a tragic *fatum*, can rise to a climax that reaches an epic dimension in some texts of Old Norse poetry.

Through its etymology, even the name *Óðinn* is associated with the idea of ecstatic frenzy (cf. the adjective *óðr*),³¹ which also seizes his followers. Furthermore, the myths that tell of the fate of the dead warriors (*einherjar*) in Valhalla, as well as the performance of magical-religious rituals (such as the throwing of the spear over the enemy army, which is thereby consecrated and "sacrificed" to the god of the dead), point to the close relationship between the warrior traditions of the pagan era and the world of the gods.

In the context of the present work, the significance of this connection war and the sacred, which in no way contradicts the prominent position ascribed elsewhere in the Old Norse world to the deities of the realm of "fertility - fruitfulness", is to be demonstrated by the emblematic figure of the berserker.

The quantity and diversity of the available sources are considerable. The medieval sources, which are often of interest to the philologist, do not all offer the same value in the eyes of the historian. For although the explicit reference to the cult of *Óðinn* is presented exclusively in Snorri, the berserkers appear in numerous Old Norse sources.

31 According to another interpretation, the name of the god derives from the noun *óðr*, which is used in the sense of "poetry", "poetic art", "magic" (cf. Hultgård 2007, p. 773). The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, as Höfler already showed in 1974. Based on a derivation of the theonym *Wotan* from the Indo-European root *h₂u₁ eh₁(l)* -, "to blow", Stefan Zimmer proposes the following interpretation: As **Wōdu-na-z*, that god is named "whose area of responsibility is travail". This interpretation can be "combined with various images of the original figure of the god, both with the old demon of death, the later Wild Hunter . . . as well as with the god of sorcery and inspired poetry" (Zimmer 2015, p. 387).

D Etymological questions and delimitation of the topic

With regard to the etymology of the noun *berserkr*, there are some uncertainties that make interpretation difficult. Two solutions can be considered, which are equally likely from a philological point of view. In the course of this work, both will be examined in more detail (see Chapter II below). One, on the old root **ber-* for bear, evokes the image of a warrior clothed in the fur of this animal; the other formed from the adjective *berr* ("naked"), corresponds in turn to the old Germanic tradition of the fight *nudis corporibus*.³² Georges Dumézil avoids this problem - followed by François-Xavier Dillmann⁽³³⁾ - by using the apt expression "guerrier-fauve"⁽³⁴⁾. This gives an impression of the savagery inherent the berserkers, without prejudging the exact meaning of the Old Norse word. This term covers all variants of the phenomenon without, for example, specifying exactly which animal species provides the fur that these animal warriors wear - an indeterminacy that seems all the more favorable since the term *berserkir* is associated in *Haraldskvæði* and other more recent sources with the compound *úlfheðnar* (Sg. *úlfheðinn*). The latter term is used for warriors who are clothed in a wolf's pelt. Do the two names *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar* describe two different categories? The skaldic stanzas do not provide a clear answer to this question, even though there is some evidence both terms refer to the same group.³⁵

In contrast to the appellative *berserkr*, *úlfheðinn* is also used as a proper noun. det. The personal name *Úlfheðinn* is attested on Swedish rune stones from the Viking Age. However, it is not known whether the noun is older than the personal name. Furthermore, the problem is not limited to lexicographical issues: in some medieval sources, animal warriors occur without being described by exact terminology. This is particularly the case with Saxo Grammaticus in the first books of his *Gesta Danorum* - where one searches in vain for the Latin form *berserkus*, which is used by modern scholars. becomes.³⁶

32 Cf. above all Tacitus, *Historiae*, II, xxii, in connection with the Germanic cohorts of Vitellius, who fight *more patrio nudis corporibus*, or also *Germania*, VI.

33 Dillmann 2000a, p. 337, note 8.

34 This is the title of chapter VI in *Mythes et dieux des Germains* (Dumézil 1939). Cleasby (*IED*, p. 61) defines *berserkr* as a "wild warrior". Gunter Müller uses the term "animal warrior" (Müller 1970, p. 178 f.), which is also used in rest of this work.

35 See Chapters II and III below.

36 Cf. from the 17th century onwards the works of Gudmundus Andreae, Olaus Verelius et al, see Ch. II below. In 1725 a work by Ericus Ramelius entitled *Berserkus furorque berserkicus* was published in Uppsala.

The word *berserkr* appears very often in the Icelandic sagas, but it is not used uniformly. Some accounts have their origins in legendary traditions or make use of purely literary topoi rather than historical tradition.

The idea of metamorphosis, the transformation of the physical shell, is sometimes associated with the berserkers - as evidenced by the vocabulary used in magical practices and religious beliefs. Several expressions that are formed based on a word that denotes the soul in its visible form (an. *hamr*) give the impression of a change appearance - one can speak of a change in behavior and mental state in this context: *eigi einhamr*, *skipta hǫnum*³⁷etc. These characteristics sometimes lead to confusion with werewolf legends, which are often much younger.

How can the image of animal warriors be sketched more precisely? What limits must be set for this study? Given the nature of the phenomena under consideration, they are necessarily broad: the object of investigation must be analyzed from a comprehensive perspective, while starting from a

"longue durée" to the entirety of the related areas (Anglo-Saxon and continental Germanic). The focus will nevertheless be on the period from 6th century to the turn of the millennium in the Scandinavian region. This choice is not arbitrary: the iconography of the Vendel period (6th-8th century)³⁸ provides the first convincing evidence for the existence of the animal warriors, whose traditions reach their peak in the subsequent Viking Age.

For the older period, historical research has a very limited corpus of sources at its disposal, which unfortunately only allows for hypothetical conclusions, while many sources from the more recent period, in which the position of Christianity in Scandinavia was already strengthened, are of little relevance to the subject of research: With the end of the Viking Age, a society hostile to berserkers develops in the Nordic world, in which they are gradually equated with professional hooligans, highwaymen and the mentally ill.

Beyond the purely mythical aspects as well as the medieval fables and stereotypes, an attempt will be made to gain an understanding of the significance of the *berserksgangr* in the rituals and martial traditions of pagan Scandinavia.

³⁷ For the meaning and use of these idioms, see Chapter VII below.

³⁸ The Vendel period (Swedish: Vendeltiden) takes its name from a parish in the north of the Swedish province of Uppland, where important archaeological discoveries were made. The Vendel period covers a period corresponding to the last two centuries of the Merovingian period (from 550 AD to 750 AD) (cf. Arrhenius 2006).

The approach will be historical, based on the description, classification, dating and subsequent explanation of the facts. Last but not least, the role of the berserkers in Old Norse society must be defined as precisely as possible. In this context, an attempt will also be made to show their links with certain institutions - such as the 'sacred' kingship and allegiance - whose scope and early development are still the subject of fierce controversy today.

No claim is to provide definitive answers to the questions discussed. It is merely an attempt to contribute new food for thought to a discussion that is too often divided between a somewhat undistanced evaluation of the sources of the Old Norse and the opposite tendency towards hypercriticism.

E Typology of the sources

The project proves to be complex: the source material handed down from Scandinavia raises a number of difficulties of interpretation. These result above all from the time frame in which the medieval texts were written down, which usually begins long after the events described, but also from the wide range of sources as a whole - archaeological material, epigraphic monuments, skaldic and eddic poems, prose works whose literary quality often exceeds their historiographical value, and finally some legal texts.

These difficulties are not insurmountable if one observes the principles laid down by Lucien Musset: "Chacune de ces catégories de sources doit être critiquée selon des méthodes distinctes. Toujours une extrême prudence chronologique que s'impose".³⁹ From the end of the 8th century to the middle of the 11th century, Scandinavian civilization, whose apparent homogeneity cannot disguise its diverse regional peculiarities, underwent significant developments. Although the early representatives of Old Norse philology often treat this long historical period, which is conveniently referred to as the Viking Age⁽⁴⁰⁾ as a unit that remained virtually unchanged over the course of two and a half centuries, a more differentiated view must be adopted today.

³⁹ Musset 1968, p. 229 f.

⁴⁰ Lucien Musset, for his part, has proposed a periodization around a "first Viking Age", covering roughly the years 790 to 930, followed by a "second Viking Age", which begins around 980 and ends around 1030 (cf. Musset 1969). This dichotomy seems to refer primarily to the waves of Scandinavian expansion overseas. Christianization, which carried out at different times in the regions, is undoubtedly the decisive reason for the changes that Nordic society underwent around the turn of the millennium.

The problems arising from the variety of sources will be briefly described below.

The most significant pictorial evidence provided by the archaeological material dates to the period before the Viking Age: the Vendel period.⁴¹ This is the case, among others, with the four matrices from Torslunda (Öland). One of them shows a one-eyed warrior wearing a horned helmet and a warrior dressed from head to knee in a wolf pelt; two others show people either fighting two bears or leading a bound bear-like animal on a leash; the latter shows two armed men whose helmets are decorated with depictions of boars.

These objects a relatively stereotypical iconography, related to Anglo-Saxon (helmet from Sutton Hoo, belt buckle from Finglesham), Alemannic (sword scabbard from Gutenstein, pressed plate from Ob- righeim) and Scandinavian finds (helmets from Vendel and Valsgärde). Such a spread of identical motifs, which can be regarded as a "common treasure of pictorial symbols"⁴², seems to testify to the existence of comparable martial traditions, linked to common beliefs and rites.

Nevertheless, the identification of the scenes that adorn such helmets or other pieces of equipment from the 6th or 7th century remains difficult. The appearance of certain motifs is consistent with the information provided by the literary sources and the name material (cf. the personal name *úlfheðinn*, among others). As a result, it is reasonable to assume that these images could represent animal warriors. Nevertheless, one question always arises: is this a depiction of people and rituals or of mythical creatures and scenes?

Of course, great care must be taken when comparing archaeological evidence from the Merovingian or Vendel period with later texts: Two to three centuries separate these objects from the period of early scaldic poetry. However, the iconographic and literary traditions coincide to a surprising degree. The archaeological material from the Viking Age (the carpet from Oseberg, the figures from Ekhammar, the masks from Haithabu, etc.) also provides clues that should not be neglected.

From the end of the 9th century onwards, the existence of the word *berserkir* is attested in some stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*, which have already mentioned. In addition to this work, Eddic and Skaldic texts, which are probably younger,⁴³ also use a

41 In this context, however, comparisons should also be made with older objects, such as the horns from Gallehus, which date to the beginning of the 5th century.

42 Holmqvist 1977, p. 201.

43 Klaus von See proposed a dating for these works in 1961b which, depending on the poem, ranges from the 11th to the 14th century.

similar vocabulary. Some often very late-dated texts⁴⁴ usually only contain allusions to people whose names or behavior are reminiscent of the tradition of animal warriors.

All this information is valuable, but it must be included in this study with caution. Indeed, the time period separating the creation of the oldest stanzas from their writing raises many questions about the authenticity of the sources; there is also the uncertainty surrounding the transmission process. The fragments attributed poets of the pagan period probably did not reach the hands of copyists before the 12th century. The long oral tradition to which they refer probably led to gaps and variants. The surviving texts do not always allow the original archetype to be reconstructed. They are often copies of copies - a process that involves the possibility of errors, interpolations and omissions.

The complex specifications of skaldic poetry nevertheless reduce the extent of such distortions: They allow only limited adjustments within the stanzas and essentially guarantee faithful preservation of the verses that have been handed down. The possibilities for alteration are fundamentally restricted by the strictness of the meter.

Over time, however, entire passages of text could disappear from memory. Verses from different poems were sometimes combined to form new complete works. Other fragments inserted into prose narratives were not always interpreted correctly by the medieval authors who commented on them. In the eyes of posterity, several scalps may be possible authors of the same play. And finally, it is not always easy to distinguish between an "authentic" poem and a later paraphrase: Icelanders' preference for an archaizing style is well known.

In some cases, a careful analysis of style and vocabulary enables a credible dating. Nevertheless, the attempt to interpret certain skaldic verses leaves the historian just as helpless as dealing with the archaeological finds: Viewed in isolation, these sources are hardly sufficient to create certainty.

However, it may be possible to confirm the value of the evidence gathered from the various sources by examining the onomastic material. This contains a number of anthroponyms that are reminiscent of an animal disguise. The etymology of these personal names, whose construction often resembles the compound *úlf-heðinn*, suggests a certain affinity to the world of animal warriors.

⁴⁴ Some works, which mainly belong to the *rímur* genre, were not created until after the 14th century.

The runic inscriptions allow this assertion to be partially verified. However, some inscriptions do not date from the historical period relevant to the study of the Old Norse berserker tradition. They do not provide any information about the archaic traditions of pagan Scandinavia, as they were created in a Christian context: a certain *ulueþin*, which was written in the 13th century on a gravestone near a church in Uppland⁴⁵ was probably not a wild warrior dressed in a wolf's pelt. However, the same name, in the form *ul(f)hiþin*, appears on an older Swedish stone,⁴⁶ which cannot be dated precisely; presumably, however, only a few decades separate this inscription from the time of Harald Schönhaar. Some Vendel Age inscriptions also provide fascinating accounts - such as the stone from Istaby (7th century),⁴⁷ which mentions three men who were "Wolf of War" (*Hápuwulfr*), "Wolf of the Sword" (*Hæruwulfr*) and "Wolf of the Army" (*Harifwulfr*). These individuals were probably related to each other.⁴⁸ The repeated use of alliterative names within a family is a practice that is widespread throughout the Germanic world. However, in the case of the Istaby stone, this family heritage is not limited to the repetition of a half-rhyme: judging by the significance of the three anthroponyms, the animal symbolism for the martial aristocracy forms an important reference to social position. This example does not necessarily imply that these three people were animal warriors (*úlfheðnar*); it does, however, shed light on the imaginary world in which the tradition of the berserkers developed.

More than 500 years separate this epigraphic evidence from the first prose sources, which only emerged in a Christian context from the 12th century onwards and form a rich corpus of Latin and Old Norse texts - comprising both religious and profane writings: Homily collections, hagiographies, "Royal sagas" (*Konungasögur*), "Icelandic sagas" (*Íslendingasögur*), "prehistoric sagas" (*Foraldarsögur*), "courtly" sagas (*Riddarasögur*), legal texts, etc.

When examining each of these sources, the researcher must keep in mind the genre to which the text belongs, as well as the possible date of writing. In addition, he must strive to identify the primary sources on which the work is based: The Icelandic saga authors support

45 U 799, Church of Långtora, Lagunda.

46 Sö 307, Igelsta mill, Södertälje.

47 DR 359, Mjällby municipality, Lister, Blekinge.

48 Cf. Jansson 1987, p. 20 f. The name *Hariwulfr* appears on another stone from the Lister area, the stone from Stentofte (DR 357), alongside the name *Hápuwulfr* - this also appears on the neighboring stone from Gummarp (DR 358). It is most likely the same group of people (cf. Birkmann 1995, p. 114 f.; Williams 2001, pp. 509-512; Schulte 2014). The inscriptions are discussed in more detail in Chapter IX of this study.

In some cases, they rely on the Scaldic tradition, which they thus preserve for posterity. In other cases, they are inspired by models from foreign courtly literature, which they rework more or less precisely. This diversity results in a very contrasting image in which the berserker is attributed both mythical and heroic as well as despicable or ridiculous traits.

The term is used for such different figures that it creates an incoherent picture: they are elite warriors, followers of a powerful ruler, but also fearsome adventurers, brigands, swashbucklers, if they not fairy-tale or "exotic" beings: Wizards, Mohammedans, trolls or giants, etc. Certainly, the abundance of these different literary characters, which were developed long after the probable disappearance of the phenomenon, provides information about the semantic development of the term in medieval literature. But the description of a collection of quaint and stereotypical figures does not allow us to reconstruct a historically attested tradition.

Even in Snorri's work, the image of the beast warriors is not unchangeable: In the course of the sagas that make up the first part of *Heimskringla*, the author first describes the *berserksgangr* in a mythical context; he then introduces some real people with traits of authentic berserkers: Hildebrand and Haki in the *Hálfðanar saga svarta* (ch. V)⁴⁹ and Berðlu-Kári and Þórir haklangr in the *Ha- ralds saga hárfagra* (ch. XII and XVIII).⁵⁰

While Snorri in the *Ynglinga saga* describes the *berserksgangr* as a form of frenzy peculiar to the "men of Óðinn", the same concept is used with a different meaning by the Icelandic men of law: The *Grágás*⁵¹ explains the *berserksgangr* as an expression of violence - in this case it is probably not a reminder of vanished pagan traditions.

The contrasts are often preserved in the same text: according to the *Egils saga Skalla- Grimssonar*, both the Skald's father and grandfather surrender to *berserksgangr* in battle against King Haraldr's troops, while in one of the stanzas attributed him, Egill accuses an animal warrior of "sacrificing to the gods". This poem is in all likelihood apocryphal: Egill did not live to see the introduction of Christianity to Iceland. The material of the Icelandic sagas must therefore be used with caution.

The historicity of the *Fornaldarsögur* is even less. They can nevertheless, in a generally degenerate form, transmit certain myths or authentic traditions (*Völ-unga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka* etc.) - the same remark applies, incidentally, in the 13th century for the first nine books of the *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus.

49 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 90 f.

50 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, pp. 114 and 123.

51 Vilhjálmur Finsen (ed./trans.) 1852, 1, p. 23. On the compilation of Old Icelandic laws, known since the 16th century as *grágás* (gray goose), cf. e.g. Strauch 2011, p. 234 f.

Whatever genre they belong to, most of the sagas originated in Iceland, in an oligarchic society without kings or jarls, in which the phenomenon of animal warriors could not exist in the long term. Moreover, after the conversion to Christianity around the year 999, the berserkers no longer had a place in society. The path from the literary theme to reality is therefore sometimes a long one.

F Methodological Principles

Since the end of the 17th century, various research opinions have emerged from the different studies devoted to the topic. However, the large number of proposed arguments provides an inconsistent picture. To this day, this topic is approached in two ways: One approach relies almost exclusively on the study of Old Norse texts, which are often only slightly historical; the second resorts to a comparative approach by combining the written sources, archaeological findings and the transmission of folk traditions - in this way, the Scandinavian tradition becomes a much more extensive Germanic one, if not Indo-European as a whole.

The first method, which is often influenced by hypercritical opinions, results either in rationalistic interpretations or the refutation of the phenomenon, which is reduced to a literary or folkloristic phenomenon. In this context, Snorri's tradition is often belittled. The second method, on the other hand, which focuses particularly on the study of , often identifies the animal warriors with the representatives of cult customs and archaic rites, thus confirming Snorri's statements. The theories of this school are based primarily on the teachings of anthropology, sociology and the history of religion. Objections to this approach relate above all to the daring comparisons, which are very far apart in terms of time and space, linking distant traditions with each other.

An attempt will be made to circumvent the problems inherent in the two methodological approaches by taking a middle course: The Scandinavian accounts will be given a decisive importance without neglecting the traditions that other areas of the Germanic world have. In order to achieve this, the aim must be to examine each type of source individually before combining the different elements to reconstruct a coherent whole. Each piece of information should be placed in a chronological perspective - without overlooking the imprecise dating for this period.

For this reason, this study follows different guidelines than those that determined Gerard Breen's dissertation on the berserker in ancient Icelandic literature with regard to this topic:⁵²The aim should not be to describe the development of a literary figure exhaustively and to assign equal relevance to different character traits associated with it. The first step is draw on the traditions that allow the historical reality of this phenomenon to be precisely classified. This selective approach is not without its risks: it is sometimes difficult to establish criteria for a very restrictive selection, as scientific meticulousness demands that no source *be a priori*.

In many cases, it is not easy to distinguish the authentic elements from the more or less fantastic topoi. However, certain indications that make a differentiation possible can be classified as reliable. Many secondary aspects, which can be found in several types of sources, are demonstrably the result of various influences, without reference to the facts dealt with here. The repeated use of certain motifs, which vary greatly depending on the context, should not be misleading. It is mostly the reproduction of a stereotype: The berserkers fear neither iron nor fire, they show their ferocity by howling horribly, biting the edge of their shields and then falling into apathy as soon as the attack is over, etc.

These characteristics, which can be combined in different ways, are found so frequently in the texts that they have led to different "rational" interpretations from the 17th century to the present day: The use of hallucinogenic substances, hereditary epilepsy, etc. Thus, the typological diversity of stories about berserkers corresponds to the gradual interweaving of certain clichés of various origins: the interplay of imitation and literary references has undoubtedly promoted the unconscious interchange of different phenomena. The multitude of possible explanations undoubtedly results from this particular source situation.

Although the various literary aspects will also be examined, the focus will largely be on the oldest sources: the iconography of the Vendel and Viking Age, skaldic poems attributed to pagan poets, and the eponymic material that has been handed down in the runic inscriptions, among other things.

In view of this tradition, the phenomenon of the Old Norse berserkers must be seen as a combination of warlike, mythical and cultic traditions. Until the introduction of Christianity, the ancient Scandinavians, who were influenced by various beliefs in this area, attributed a sacred aspect to the *furor*. In the case of some elite warriors, these fits seem to refer to an animal kinship, as is also the case with

⁵² Breen 1999a.

implies the wearing of furs and masks. An attempt will be made to verify this thesis.

As already mentioned, the philological investigation is only a partial aspect: simply listing the various occurrences of the word *berserkr* does not allow us to grasp the entirety of the problem. This term appears regularly in Old Icelandic literature, whereas it was apparently unknown in certain parts of the Scandinavian world from Denmark to Sweden for a long time. Instead, depending on the period and local traditions, other expressions and words may have been used to represent the various forms of animal warfare - *úlfhedinn* being one of them.

Some researchers investigate only partial aspects of this broad field by are limited to the content of the sagas, etymological analyses or even "physiological" considerations (including theories about the use of hallucinogenic substances or the influence of mental illness). This is particularly the case with Fredrik Grøn (1929a) and Erik Noreen (1932).

In turn, other philologists have taken archaeological or eponymological material into account in their investigations of traditions related to the phenomenon of animal warriors - the works of Heinrich Beck or Gunter Müller on ancient Germanic animal symbolism come to mind here⁽⁵³⁾.

In his dissertation on the berserker in Old Norse literature, Benjamin Blaney (1972) draws primarily on the theses of Lily Weiser-Aall⁽⁵⁴⁾ (1927), Otto Höfler and Georges Dumézil, but does not always seem endeavor to embed the topic in a precise historical context. The significance he ascribes to the initiation rite is perhaps appropriate for an archaic phase of Germanic cultures, but cannot be readily applied to the Viking Age. However, the sources in which animal warriors appear refer mainly to this period. These traditions certainly did not emerge *ex nihilo*.⁵⁵ However, the early historical emergence of this phenomenon can no longer be reconstructed due to a lack of contemporary historiographical sources.

In view of the large number of unanswered questions, it seems necessary to the available information. The aim to present a new overview aimed at a better understanding of the warrior traditions in Scandinavian paganism.

To this end, the state of research will first be considered (Chapter I), before an etymological analysis of the terms *berserkr* and *úlfhedinn* is undertaken (Chapter II).

53 On these two authors, see above all the references cited in Chapter I. On Germanic animal symbolism, see also Scheibelreiter 1976, p. 40 f.

54 Strictly speaking, the book was published in 1927 under the name Lily Weiser. After her marriage to the Norwegian Anathon Aall in 1928, she went by the double name Weiser-Aall. For reasons of standardization, this name will be used throughout the book.

55 As the archaeological record attests, which is analyzed in Chapter IX.

The use of these two expressions in Eddic and Skaldic poetry will be commented on, with particular attention paid to *Haraldskvæði* (chapter III). The various descriptions of the battle in the Hafirsfjord that appear in some *Íslendingasögur* will then be examined, before the social status of the beast warriors is analyzed on the basis of the depiction in the *Egils saga* (chap. IV). This text also serves as evidence for possible relations between werewolf concepts and the beliefs associated with the *berserksgangr* in pagan Norway (Chapter V).

What follows is a list of sources that link the beast warriors to the Óðinn myth (chapter VI). The focus here is on discussing the value of the information contained in Snorri's *Ynglinga saga*.

Finally, the results of this investigation are compared with common stereotypes from medieval literature (Chapter VII). The semantic development that the term *berserkr* underwent, as well as the fictional character and the late date of origin of the sources, make it difficult to reconstruct the historical phenomenon. Nevertheless, some indications allow a coherent interpretation to be made. If possible, an attempt should be made to separate the literary conventions from an authentic tradition in which martial practices and religious beliefs were linked.

The overview of the Old Norse sources ends with the figure of Þórir hundr (Chapter VIII). Together with his followers, he represents one of the last historically attested manifestations of an archaic form of Germanic allegiance at the beginning of the 11th century, which was closely linked to the legacy of pagan customs.

For this reason, the difficult question of the origin of allegiance, which Tacitus describes as one of the core institutions of Germanic society under the name *comitatus*, will also be discussed in the course of this study. Some researchers, such as Hans Kuhn (1956), see allegiance as a very time- and space-limited phenomenon that was imported to the north around the turn of the millennium based on Anglo-Saxon models. According to Kuhn, the description of the *Ge-folgschaft* and the use of the Old Norse term *hirð* in the medieval sources that report on pre-Christian Scandinavian society is an anachronism, as the *comitatus* in the Germanic world, apart from a late resumption at the court of Christian rulers was only attested in the Roman imperial period among some tribes near the Limes. However, more recent studies - including contributions by John Lindow (1976), Reinhard Wenskus (1992) and Heiko Steuer (1992) ^{(56) (-)} - make it possible to relativize Kuhn's hypercritical ideas and to demonstrate a close connection between followership and the early forms of Germanic kingship - a thesis that is supported not least by means of

⁵⁶ See also Steuer 1998 (for further references, see Chapter IX).

The aim is to verify this by examining the archaeological and onomastic sources associated with the tradition of animal warriors (Chapter IX).

This approach makes it possible to show a connection between the berserkers and their cultic customs and the sacred dimension of the ruler's function in the context of pre-Christian Old Norse followers. Last but not least, eight centuries after Snorri Sturluson, the aim is to bring the ideas and customs of the "men of Óðinn" back to light.

Chapter I State of research

The figure of the berserker has long attracted the attention of philologists, archaeologists and historians. The multitude of sources and the variety of interpretation methods have contributed to the development of contradictory theories, which will be examined here from a chronological perspective.

The history of research is divided into three main phases, each of which is linked to developments in the history of ideas.

The age of the "pioneers" stretches from the end of the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century. It coincided with the first editions of Old Norse literature and reached its peak at the beginning of the Romantic period: modern philology experienced its upswing with the growing interest in legendary lore and popular traditions.

The etymological interpretation of the word *berserkr* proposed by Sveinbjörn Egilsson in his *Lexicon poëticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis*, published in 1860, decisively renewed the image of animal warriors and the scholarly discussion about their tradition. Several important studies published from the second half of the 19th century onwards enrich the research situation with a comprehensive survey of the medieval sources. The archaeological material that comes to light during this period provides valuable iconographic material that makes it possible to confirm the written tradition. However, linguists are reluctant to integrate this information into a comparative and interdisciplinary approach: An essay published by Hermann Güntert in 1912 does not take it into account at all.

Between the two world wars, the investigation of these questions was given a decisive impetus by the influence of the Viennese "mythological" school of Rudolf Much. Lily Weiser-Aall and Otto Höfler tackled the problem of animal warriors from a new perspective largely inspired by ethnological observations. Their observations, the main features of which were adopted by Georges Dumézil and Jan de Vries, were harshly rejected by the most critical philologists, who were opposed to any religious interpretation of the phenomenon (Erik Noreen, Hans Kuhn and Klaus von See).

Contemporary analyses are often dependent on which approach is used, although the new archaeological and eponymological finds continue to broaden the horizons of research to a great extent.

The brief overview below makes no claim to completeness.¹The main aim is to summarize the main existing theories and the main objections they raise. These are, of course, the subject of a thorough discussion in the course of this work.

A The early research approaches

From the second half of the 17th century onwards, when scholars' interest in Scandinavian antiquity increased, the Old Norse noun *berserkr* gradually entered Swedish ("bärsärk"), Danish ("bersærk") and German ("Berserker") usage⁽²⁾.

The first attempts at explanation are obviously based on the tradition of Snorri Sturluson.³The berserkers are wild warriors who advance in battle without armor (cf. an. *brynjulauss*, "without breastplate", "without chain mail").

In his edition of the *Hervarar saga*, published in Uppsala in 1672, Olaus Verelius established the etymology of the word *berserkr* based on the adjective *berr-* (*nudus*) (see Chapter II above). The Swedish philologist, however, did not know whether he should attribute the *furor* of the animal warriors to their natural disposition or to the influence of a demon: "an vero ab intumescence bile & ebulliente sanguine, aut à dæmone aliquo concitatus fuerit hic furor, qui bacchantium furorem superavit non capio"⁽⁴⁾.

In 1772, Bishop Finnur Jónsson wrote in the first volume of his *Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae* obviously attributes the invulnerability of the berserkers to sorcery: "Erant viri robusti, sed fascinosi et ut plurimum incantatores, qui cutem arte diabolica induraverant, ne iis ferrum ignisve nocere posset."⁵This author also regarded the animal warriors as "naked and armorless" warriors: "*berserkir*, id est, nudi et sine loricâ in cædes et pugnas ruentes".

In the appendix to the arnamagnæan edition of the *Kristni saga*, which was published in 1773, the jurist Jon Erichsen produced the

1 Several references that are not explicitly mentioned in this chapter have nevertheless been in the bibliography. Some of them are cited in the specific chapters dealing primarily with etymological or archaeological aspects.

2 Cf. Noreen 1932, p. 242.

3 *The editio princeps* of the *Heimskringla* by Johan Peringskiöld in Stockholm dates from 1697, although a translation completed in 1599 by the Norwegian pastor Peder Claussøn Friis and published in Copenhagen in 1633 by Ole Worm had already become widely known among scholars.

4 *Hervarar saga* (Verelius (ed.) 1672), p. 50. Noreen 1932, p. 246, sensibly places these lines in the context of the many witch trials that took place in Uppland in Verelius' time.

5 Finnus Johannæus 1772-1778, 1, p. 45.

⁶This researcher made three "psychological" causes responsible for the origin of this phenomenon: "impotentia animi, malorum geniorum sive spirituum vis et vitium temperamentis sive morbus"⁷ - the inability of the soul to control itself, the influence of ominous spirits, mental illness. Erichsen also adopted the "traditional" etymological interpretation: "*berserkr* (a *ber* nudus & *sekr*, proprie indusium, soed poëticè lorica), quod hominem loricâ non indutum significat"⁽⁸⁾.

Towards the end of the 18th century, a new theory emerged that influenced by the rationalist trend of the Enlightenment: Samuel Lorenzo Ödman, a theologian at the University of Uppsala, linked the frenzy of the berserkers to the consumption of the mushroom *Amanita muscaria* ("fly agaric", Swedish: "flugsvamp"). ⁽⁹⁾Such customs, which were observed among the Sami and the peoples of Siberia and the Kamchatka Peninsula¹⁰, are not recorded in the sagas⁽¹¹⁾.

This theory, which often been refuted since then, reached its peak in the encyclopaedic and medical literature - above all in the works of the Norwegian botanist Frederik Christian Schübeler.¹² It was developed in the middle of the 19th century. This idea was taken up again in the 20th century by Howard D. Fabing in his article "On Going Berserk: A Neurological Inquiry"⁽¹³⁾; isolating the hallucinogenic substance (bufotenin) contained in the mushroom, he carried out several experiments

6 Erichsen 1773, pp. 142-163.

7 Erichsen 1773, p. 155.

8 Erichsen 1773, p. 162.

9 Ödman 1784. The same rationalist explanation was sometimes used for visions described in connection with sorcery.

10 We owe one of the first descriptions of the phenomenon in the context of a shamanic ritual in Kamchatka to Philipp Johann von Strahlenberg (1730). The topic of the consumption of *Amanita muscaria* in a magical-religious context gave rise to a large number of publications, of which Wasson 1968 is particularly noteworthy (the author equates the fly agaric with the Vedic *soma*); see also Brough 1971 (this article contradicts Wasson's theories); Czi-gány 1980.

11 Kaplan (1975) believes that he was able to identify certain motifs depicting mushrooms on Bronze Age Swedish rock paintings from a much earlier period - according to him, this type of depiction was suitable for evoking orgiastic cults. This thesis is difficult to verify. Again, one must take note of the appearance of warriors with animal masks on rock carvings (cf. Chapter IX), which attest to the age of such a practice. In this respect, it is always difficult to compare the beliefs of the Bronze Age - which are almost completely unknown to us - with those of the Viking Age. Nevertheless, one can assume a continuity of certain concepts based on an Indo-European heritage. On this highly debated question, see Schier 1992 and Schjødt 1986, among others.

12 Cf. Schübeler 1886, p. 224 f. Thorsen 1948 is skeptical of Schübeler's conclusions. For further references, see Noreen 1932 and Grøn 1929a.

13 Fabing 1956; Bauerle 1958 mentions Fabing's conclusions with approval.

inmates of the Ohio State Prison. However, the description of the reactions by the ingestion of the substance hardly matches the symptoms described in the medieval texts⁽¹⁴⁾.

Despite these disputable findings, Ödman's thesis continued to the interest of some researchers. In 1970, Hanscarl Leuner mentioned the consumption of these mushrooms by animal warriors to illustrate "the historical role of magical plants and their active ingredients"⁽¹⁵⁾. The latest studies on the effects of the mushroom were summarized in an article by the Icelander Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, which appeared in the journal *Skírnir* in 2001 under the title "Um berserki, berserksgang og amonita muscaria". It lists the most important Old Norse sources on the *berserksgangr*⁽¹⁶⁾.

However, several important toxicologists have rejected any connection between the rage of the berserkers and *Amanita muscaria*. According to Wolfgang Schmidbauer and Jürgen vom Scheidt, only the ingestion of a considerable - and therefore dangerous - dose of the fly agaric is capable of inducing a state of irritability similar to the *furor* of the animal warriors. This intoxication usually had a euphoric, calming or hallucinogenic effect that did not meet the demands of close combat: "anyone who knows the current results regarding the psychological effects of *Amanita muscaria* will no longer see the berserkers under the influence of the fly agaric".¹⁷ In order to give Ödman's thesis a certain justification, it would be necessary to assume the existence of a drink that achieves the desired effect in an immediate way, but without the risk of incapacitating the drinker. However, this possibility seems quite unlikely.

The main argument against this theory therefore remains the lack of any mention of the ingestion of mushrooms, drugs or alcohol in the medieval descriptions of the *berserksgangr*. According to the written tradition, the frenzy of the animal warriors is always extremely sudden: the phenomenon occurs abruptly without preparation or intent - which cannot be reconciled with deliberate poisoning, as Renate Doht also emphasizes in her work on the *intoxicating potion in Germanic myth*⁽¹⁸⁾.

14 Cf. Blaney 1972, p. 10 ff.

15 Leuner 1970, p. 280 ff. Fatur 2019 attempts to explain the *berserksgangr* by the inclusion of *Hyoscyamus niger* (black henbane), which is not convincing on the basis of the an. sources - also not convincing.

16 Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001b also examined the theme of werewolf transformation in her preface to the edition of the *Úlfhams saga*; once again in an article published in 2007: "The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature".

17 Schmidbauer / vom Scheidt 1971, p. 57.

18 Doht 1974, p. 21; see also Dimbleby 1967, p. 73.

Most researchers have therefore received Ödman's thesis with the greatest skepticism.¹⁹ Moreover, this discussion concerns only purely physiological aspects of the subject: the consumption of a substance that promotes the induction of trance cannot explain the role played by animal warriors in pagan society - if it does not even reduce the tradition of berserkers to a warlike form of shamanism, which is not entirely convincing (see below in connection with Peter Buchholz's thesis).

The analysis of the behavior of the animal warriors must not be limited to an examination of the means that can trigger the *berserksgangr*: the debate must also address in a more general way the significance that the phenomenon had in Old Norse culture - as well as the religious beliefs that were associated with it.

Research interest in this topic grew considerably in the first decades of the 19th century with the publication of the large collections of sources edited the Dane Carl Christian Rafn, among others.²⁰ During the Romantic period, the study of folkloristic material and saga traditions - especially topics such as the "wild hunt" and lycanthropy²¹ - aroused increasing interest. Scandinavian scholars put forward the thesis that there was a connection between the description of the *berserksgangr* and the presentation of metamorphosis - whether as a phenomenon of a physiological or psychological nature. Niels M. Petersen briefly addresses this question in 1839 in a collection dedicated to the story of the skald Egill⁽²²⁾. So did Rudolph Keyser in his 1847 study on the religion of ancient Norse.²³ Nevertheless, these studies are not directed against the "traditional" etymological interpretation: the word *berserkr* always refers to the image of a warrior "without armor"²⁴.

19 As Hans Peter Duerr 1985, p. 409 also admits, even if he is in favor of this theory. In his study on *soma*, even Wasson 1968, pp. 177 f. and 341, showed himself to be averse to it. Among the Scandinavian researchers, Grøn 1929a in particular emphasizes the importance of rejecting Schübeler's statements about the origin of *berserksgangr*.

20 This refers primarily to the *Fornmanna sögur*, which were published from 1825 onwards, and the *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*, which appeared in 1829-1830.

21 Cf. among others Friedrich Panzer 1848-1855, 2, chap. VIII, "Wütendes Heer", p. 441 f. The large collections of popular tales compiled from 1812 in Germany by the Brothers Grimm (*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*) or from 1818 in Denmark by Just Mathias Thiele (*Danske Folkesagn*) also contributed to the revival of folkloristic studies.

22 Cf. among others Niels Matthias Petersen 1839-1844, 2, pp. 295-299: "Om Berserker og Berserksgang".

23 Cf. Keyser 1847, p. 126 f.

24 For further literature that the same interpretation, see Noreen 1932, p. 248.

B From Sveinbjörn Egilsson to Hermann Güntert

A few years later, however, the Icelander Sveinbjörn Egilsson was able to introduce new arguments into the discussion.²⁵ According to the author of the *Lexicon poëticum*, the root *ber-* comes from the Uri Norse **berr*, "bear" (see Chapter II below). He sees a warrior dressed in the fur of this animal: "Si radix e lingua septentrionali petenda est, putarim *berserkr* proprie esse pelle ursina indutum, a *berr* v. *bera*, ursus, ursa, et *serkr*, tunica, vestis."²⁶ Sveinbjörn's thesis immediately met with great approval among philologists.⁽²⁷⁾

At the same time, Konrad Maurer devoted a long section of his monumental work on the *conversion of the Norwegian tribes to Christianity* to the motif of the animal warriors.²⁸ The German scholar examined in detail the relationships between the practices of the berserkers and the beliefs associated with the idea of animal transformation - without, however, completely mixing the two traditions. This approach had an undeniable influence on later research. According to Maurer, the vocabulary used in connection with the description of the *ber-serksgangr* in the Old Norse sources (especially the adjective *hamrammr*,²⁹ the expression *eigi einhamr*³⁰ and the mediopassive verb *hamask*³¹) refers to a brusque change in the mental state ("an increase in corporeality"), but does not imply a real change in the body. Maurer considers that this terminology, which is derived from the noun *hamr*, has gradually lost its original meaning: *hamr* refers to the idea of the exterior, the bodily shell, and denotes precisely the form in which the soul manifests itself during a metamorphosis. Other words from the same family, such as the term *hamhleypa*³² or the phrases *at fara í hamförum*³³ and *at skipta hömum*³⁴ refer to the possibility of "changing one's own form", but are attributed in the Icelandic sagas to persons with magical abilities. Maurer interprets this semantic change as evidence of a gradual weakening of the precepts of faith.

25 Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1791-1852), theologian, philologist, poet and pedagogue, is also known for his translations of Homer into Icelandic.

26 Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1860, p. 51.

27 Cf. above all the examples cited by Noreen 1932, p. 250.

28 Maurer 1856, p. 101 f.

29 Literally "strong in relation to his *hamr*".

30 Literally a description for someone "who has more than one *hamr*".

31 Used primarily in the sense of "indulging in a state of anger".

32 Literally "the one who lets his *hamr* run (*hleypa*)". On this expression, cf. e.g. Dillmann 2006, p. 260, note 89.

33 Describes the ability to "travel in another form".

34 Literally "change the *hamr*", which means to transform.

The berserkers' ability to change their outward appearance is not explicitly mentioned. Although his lexical analysis requires differentiation,³⁵ it should be noted that no medieval source explicitly ascribes to the berserkers the ability to change their outward appearance - with the exception of a few antediluvian sagas, which obviously refer to the metamorphosis.

"late" literary traditions.

According to Maurer, important researchers have treated the subject from a similar perspective. In his *Handbook of Germanic Mythology*³⁶, Wilhelm Golther obviously assumes a parallel between berserkers and lycanthropy, while at the same time making it clear that the former do not undergo an actual transformation. According to Golther, these phenomena have their origins in beliefs related to the transmigration of souls, which leads him to also take up the subject of the *fylgja*⁽³⁷⁾.

In his inaugural address on "Divination and Magic in Norse Antiquity", Hugo Gering links the concept of the *fylgja* with the idea of kinship: "both ideas intersect".³⁸ Gering specifies that the beast warriors appear primarily as followers of a ruler ("mostly as servants of Norse princes"). He attributes the origin of their frenzy to the consumption of an intoxicating drink (a thesis also forward by the Norwegian Ingjald Reichborn-Kjennerud)³⁹ or sees it as an expression of autosuggestion.⁴⁰

The Danish folklorist Axel Olrik also devotes himself to the beast warriors. A chapter in the first volume of his important study of old Danish heroic poetry (*Danmarks Heltedigtning*)⁴¹ deals with the traditions relating to the twelve companions of Hrólfr krakis, who are all berserkers.

In his work *Germanische Mythologie*, Eugen Mogk uses the following definition for *berserkr*: "the one wrapped in bear's clothing, bear-skinned"⁴².

35 The expression *hamrammr mjök* ('clearly able to transform') in the *Land- námabók* refers to two duellists - *Dufþakr* and *Stórolfr Hængsson* - who face each other in the shape of a bear and a bull (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968, p. 355 f.). In the *Helgaqviða Hirvarðssonar*, the mediopassive verb *hamask* describes the transformation of the jarl *Fránmarr* into an eagle (Prose, p. 142). For further examples, cf. the description of the vocabulary of transformation in chapter VII of this study.

36 Golther 1895, pp. 100-103.

37 This noun is one of the old Norse terms for the soul. is primarily a female figure who can sometimes take on the role of a guardian spirit over an individual or a family, sometimes an *alter ego* who is able to separate from the body and manifest itself in animal form (e.g. as a bear or wolf). On this complete situation, see Blum 1912; Strömbäck 1975; Folke Ström 1960; Mundal 1974. For further bibliographical references, see Dillmann 2006, p. 244, note 25; Mundal 1993.

38 Gering 1902, p. 15.

39 Reichborn-Kjennerud 1928-1947, 4, pp. 139-151.

40 Gering 1902, p. 13.

41 Olrik 1903a, p. 201 f. Olrik 1919, p. 348 f.

42 Mogk 1898, p. 273.

The author regards the animal warrior as a figure from the legendary tradition that has developed from lycanthropic beliefs: "The berserkers are therefore nothing other than werewolf myths." For Mogk, this "myth" is based on an ancient idea of the soul, which is said to be able to take on the form of a bear or wolf during an ecstatic trance.⁴³ Mogk emphasizes that the Old Norse *vargúlfr* corresponds to the German *Werwolf*. However, the form *vargúlfr* has not survived outside the *Strengleikar* cycle (a prose adaptation of the *Lais de Marie de France*). It is therefore probably a more recent construction (13th century), which was used to translate the Norman *garwulf*.⁴⁴

After Mogk, Walter Müller-Bergström (1927 and 1934) and Nils Lid (1937 and 1956) in particular revived the equation of the berserker with a werewolf.

In an article published in 1905, the Swede Nils Sjöberg drew a comparison between three pieces of archaeological evidence discovered in the last decades of the Torslunda matrices (found on the island of Öland), the Gutenstein sword scabbard (unearthed near Sigmariningen) and the metal fragment from Obrigheim (from a Merovingian cemetery in the Palatinate) were found in the 19th century. All of these objects, which date to the end of the 6th century or the first half of the 7th century, show depictions of warriors dressed in wolf pelts.⁴⁵ However, it was necessary to wait for Otto Höfler's work from 1934 onwards before this iconography could actually be linked to the tradition of animal warriors.

43 Mogk 1911, p. 260: "As the name shows, they are rooted in the belief that man can send out his soul through ecstasy and assume the form of a bear or wolf." See also Mogk 1919 on the belief in werewolves.

44 *Strengleikar* (Keyser / Unger (eds.) 1850), p. 30: *Biclarret i Bretzku máli en Norðmandingar kallaðu hann vargúlfr*, translation of the verse "Bisclavret a nun en Breton, / Garwalf l'apelent li Norman" (Warnke (ed.) 1885, p. 75). The German *Werwolf* comes from the Old High German *wërwolf*, meaning "man" (*wër*) - wolf (*wolf*), a form that can be compared with the Anglo-Saxon *wër(e)wulf* (cf. Kluge 2002), while the Old Norse *vargúlfr* combines the nouns *vargr* ("wolf", but also "criminal") and *úlfr* ("wolf"). Some researchers have considered an etymology for the Old High German *wërwolf* based on the older form **wariwulf*, which could be derived from the Gothic *wasjan* ("to clothe"). This construction offers an interpretation that is close to the Old Norse *úlfheðinn*, but also to the Slavic *vlukodlacu* and the Latin *versipellis*. But this etymological interpretation, as convincing as it may be, stands on shaky ground (cf. Sohm 2006 and the literature cited there).

45 Cf. Sjöberg 1905 In an earlier study on the sword scabbard of Gutenstein, Naue had already mentioned the matrices of Torslunda in 1889, which Montelius brought to public attention 1877.

In the first volume of his work *Vikingerne*⁴⁶, Alexander Bugge - like Ödman before him - compares the frenzy of the berserkers with the phenomenon of amok observed among the population of Malaysia.⁴⁷In a later work on Norwegian history⁴⁸, Bugge seems to attribute this frenzy to the consumption of fermented beverages: "alkoholforgiftning har vel ogsaa virket med"⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Some Norwegian articles and works dealing with questions of the psyche⁵⁰ to the development of a theory at the beginning of the 20th century according to which the *berserksgangr* was due to epileptic seizures.

In 1912, Hermann Güntert wrote a new overview of the sources in which the animal warriors appear in his article "Über altisländische Berserker-Geschichten". In contrast to Mogk, he concedes full credibility to the existence of berserkers. Güntert does not see a connection between the frenzy of the animal warriors and the ingestion of poisonous mushrooms. He divides the berserkers into two groups: On the one hand, the pathological cases showing nervous or psychological suffering, and on the other, the professional fighters and highwaymen.⁵¹By establishing a link with the Celtic *Fianna* and the hero Cúchulainn, the German philologist establishes the thesis of a Norwegian influence on Irish mythology.⁵²However, the Celts had their own traditions of "heroic frenzy", as the detailed studies by Kim Mac Cone or Helmut Birkhan clearly show.⁵³Some authors - including the Swiss Ludwig Rübekeil (2002b) - even attribute a Celtic origin to the warlike aspects of the Odin cult. However, this Celto-Germanic relationship has numerous parallels in the Vedic and Iranian areas, which have been clearly demonstrated by Stig Wikander (1938), Georges Dumézil (1985) and Kris Kershaw (2000). Such similarities can be explained against a common Indo-European background rather by heredity.

46 Bugge 1906, pp. 76-82.

47 Spores 1988.

48 Bugge 1910, p. 113.

49 An 18th century text compares the *berserksgangr* with certain forms of intoxication: "Ølqveisa er formodentlig de Gamles Berserkergang" (Hans Jakob Wille, *Beskrivelse over Sillejords Præstegjeld i Øvre-Tellemarken i Norge*, Copenhagen, 1786, p. 144; text quoted from Breen 1999a, p. 93). For other proponents of this thesis, which finds no echo in the Old Norse sources, see also Reichborn-Kjennerud 1928-1947, 4, p. 60.

50 Cf. the references in Grøn 1929a, p. 12.

51 Güntert 1912, p. 25: "So I would also like to divide the Berserkers . . . two large groups: The smaller one consists of people who are genuinely sick of the nerves, who suffer from moods and who from time to time, especially when they are irritated, have a fit of raving madness with feverish symptoms. The more numerous group of berserkers, however, consists of wild, irascible and

rough fellows, from the rowdy, handsy Viking to the common criminal . . .".

52 Güntert 1912, p. 27 f.

53 Cf. inter alia McCone 1987; Birkhan 1999 and 2006.

than by direct borrowings from one civilization to another. The *ferg fene* (*furor* of the *Fianna*) and the rage of Cúchulainn certainly do not constitute a "fantastic realization" of the berserk *gangr* in the Celtic imagination ("a description of the Nordic berserk rage translated into Celtic view and Celtic fantasy"). On this point, Hermann Güntert's work, disregarding the careful examination of the Old Norse sources, ultimately leads to hardly usable results.

In his dissertation *Primitives Erzählgut in den Íslendinga- sögur*, published in 1927, Heinz Dehmer deals with the subject under the partial aspect of an archaic fairy tale motif, which he calls "the maiden threatened by the berserker"⁽⁵⁴⁾. By regarding the berserker stories as "related to the fairy tale type of the dragon bride", Dehmer attempts to determine the archetypal structure of these tales and then to compare them with the different variants contained in the Old Icelandic sagas - an approach that disregards the historical and religious context in which the tradition of the Old Norse berserker originated.

C The era of controversies

In her habilitation thesis on *Old Germanic youth consecrations and men's societies*, published in the same year (1927), Lily Weiser-Aall views the study of this phenomenon in a completely new light. The originality of this new approach lies in the ethnological as well as historical approach to the subject - a method that differs from previous works, which were primarily based on purely philological discussions. In the wake of Heinrich Schurtz's (1902) investigations into the significance of "men's societies" and "age groups" in various, mostly non-European cultures, Weiser-Aall attempts to demonstrate the role these institutions in ancient Germanic society. After examining the tradition of the ancient authors Tacitus, Ammianus Marcellinus, Procopius and Paulus Diaconus, the Austrian folklorist devotes an important part of her work to the Nordic sources. Weiser-Aall portrays the berserkers of the pagan era as heirs of archaic religious beliefs and rites - members of warlike brotherhoods that were linked to the Odinic cult of death. According to the author, the introduction of Christianity accelerated the demise of this tradition. However, the Old Norse sources do not provide any direct evidence that would indicate with certainty the existence of any "cultic initiation" of the animal warriors. Some customs associated with Ber-

⁵⁴ Dehmer 1927, p. 86 f.

However, the connection between the two core elements (see Chapter VII below) may provide clues in this direction - an interpretation that has attracted the attention of several researchers, including Mary Danielli (1945), Margaret Arent (1969), Mircea Eliade (1992), Ulf Drobin (1993) and Jens Peter Schjødt (1994, 2003, 2006, 2008), 2011).

The study *Berserksgangensvesen og Årsaksforhold*, published in 1929 by the Norwegian Fredrik Grøn, completely ignores Weiser-Aall's work. By revisiting in a more systematic way a hypothesis previously considered by Hermann Güntert, Grøn intends to demonstrate the pathological character of the *berserksgangr*. The author compares the rage of the animal warriors with the Malaysian *amok* - a phenomenon that is not due to the consumption of intoxicants, but to the influence of a mental illness. Grøn rejects Ödman's and Schübeler's conclusions, drawing on an impressive scientific bibliography. He then draws on medical studies on hysteria, epilepsy and lycanthropy. Grøn's approach - in contrast to Ödman's - finds a certain echo in the literature on the old North. However, an attentive reading of the sources, embedded in their historical perspective, reveals the limits of this "psychiatric" approach. The image of the "mad" berserker is certainly present in the Icelandic sources, as the *berserksgangr* is sometimes described there as a form of madness (see Chapter VII below). Nevertheless, these texts must be analyzed with caution: The social and religious context of medieval Iceland is not that of Viking-era Norway. The Berserker, who as elite warriors were traditionally associated with rulers, did not find a comparable social environment in Iceland into which they could have fitted. Incidentally, the tradition of animal warriors experienced a rapid decline after the arrival of Christianity in Norway. The words *berserkr* and *berserks-gangr* relatively soon acquired a pejorative connotation, far removed from the heroic reputation associated with the berserkers around the pagan kings (a reputation whose echoes, however, resonate in skaldic poetry, the kings' sagas and some antediluvian sagas).

Grøn's thesis, which supported by extensive documentation, subscribes to a purely "naturalistic" vision that leaves little room for the religious, "sacred" dimension of certain institutions and customs. However, it seems difficult to the concept of "heroic frenzy" - the manifestations of which occupy a central place in the culture of numerous Indo-European peoples - to the phenomenon of spiritual derangement. Despite this observation, "historical-medical" studies still enjoy a certain popularity. The archaeologist Jesse Byock (1993a, 1995a, 1995b), a specialist in medieval Iceland, is also concerned with proving the pathological origin of the behavior attributed to the skald Egill Skallagrímsson: His irritability was said to be a result of Paget's disease (osteodystrophia deformans),

a chronic condition that causes bone growths that can deform the skull. Byock's thesis is in fact based on the description of Egil's skull, which tradition attests to be unusually large. But how should we interpret the strange gift attributed to Egil's ancestor, Kveld- Úlfr ('evening wolf'), who is said to be mjök *hamrammr* ('very capable of shape-shifting')? Should we also consider the berserkers surrounding the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri to be a group of psychopaths?

A much more differentiated "psychiatric" approach comes from the Norwegian Jon Geir Høyesteren (2004). This states a clear difference between the "psychosis" with lycanthropy and the "self-induced dissociative trance" of the *berserksgangr* ("selvindusert dissosiativ transe"). According to him, this trance refers to an autosuggestive phenomenon based on the beliefs of the pagan north.

Høyesteren thus emphasizes the importance of the religious and cultic aspects in the tradition of the animal warriors. Several scholars have neglected this dimension in order to limit themselves to a purely "profane" approach. This is particularly the case with Erik Noreen, whose article "Ordet bärsärk", published in 1932, largely agrees with Grøn's ideas. Noreen, however, concentrates on etymological questions by categorically returning to the old interpretation, which is based on Snorri Sturluson's interpretation. The Scandinavian scholar refuses to accept Weiser-Aall's investigations.⁵⁵ Although he agrees with the existence of a reference to lycanthropic beliefs,⁵⁶ he rejects the theses based on an approach via the names *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn* - two composites which, in his eyes, are completely different forms. Beyond the philological arguments, Noreen judges the image of the berserker dressed in a bearskin coat as unrealistic - according to him, an outfit that does not fit the handling weapons. At the end of his study, the author devotes a few words to the sources that ascribe the traits of elite warriors to the beast warriors. From Noreen's point of view, however, this aspect appears marginal compared to the pathological dimension emphasized by Grøn⁽⁵⁷⁾.

In contrast to these authors, the Viennese Otto Höfler - who expands on the perspectives opened up by Lily Weiser-Aall - emphasizes the reports that link the berserkers with certain cults in the ancient north (above all those of the god Wotan/Óðinn).

⁵⁵ Noreen 1932, p. 247, note 2.

⁵⁶ Noreen 1932, p. 252: ". . . förbindelsen med varulvstron är sålunda klar".

⁵⁷ Noreen 1932, p. 253: "Utöver den 'tekniska', patologiska innebörden har fon. *Berserkr* också helt enkelt betydelsen 'tapper krigare' . . .".

In his book *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (1934), Höfler examines the Old Norse sources with regard to the cultic customs with the myth of the "army of the dead" (cf. the *feralis exercitus* in Tacitus) and the initiation rites of specific warrior groups.⁵⁸ Höfler ascribes the wearing of "masks" and animal disguises, as well as the phenomenon of ecstatic frenzy. His approach is based not only on the analysis of medieval sources, but also on the - sometimes very problematic - interpretation of later popular traditions and the comparison with archaeological finds - in doing so he refers, among other things, to the matrices of Torslunda.

Höfler also devoted a great deal of space to the tradition of animal warriors in his later works.⁵⁹ In his last monograph, published in 1973, in which he argues against Friedrich Ranke (1940) and his interpretation of the legend of the wild army as the result of psychological processes and pathological disorders of consciousness, Höfler creates an interesting typology of mask cults, which he interprets as "transformation cults". In this context, the wearing of masks constitutes a "numinous experience" in the course of which the participants undergo a psychological transformation that allows them to superhuman powers. Through the masking, mythical beings are "present", in which both the spectators and those in disguise themselves can believe within the framework of the "being-sharing" that takes hold of them. The cult thus becomes the "dramatic" expression of the myth.⁶⁰ In this sense, the animal warriors can indeed be perceived as "companions of Óðinn". The significance of masks in "ritual dramas" has also been studied by the British ethnologist Terry Gunnell (1995).⁶¹

In 1976, Höfler wrote the article "Berserker" for the second edition of the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. This text can also be seen as a summary of his research on this topic. The author is primarily in favor of the etymological interpretation proposed by Sveinbjörn Egilsson - a thesis that is supported by Gunter Müller's research into the names.

58 Cf. Höfler 1934, pp. 163-275: "Zur altnordischen Überlieferung". For an almost contemporary, concise study of the "berserker stories" from the Icelandic sagas, see Huchting-Gminder 1933.

59 Cf. inter alia Höfler 1936a, 1936b, 1940, 1952b, 1973a and 1976.

60 The idea of a possible connection between cult customs and mythology in the Old Norse world has recently been confirmed by the studies of Lotte Hedeager (2001; 2002), who ascribes a "cosmographic" dimension to the Danish Iron Age central place Gudme.

61 See also Gunnell (ed.) 2007.

In his detailed analysis of Germanic names reminiscent of animal names,⁶² Gunter Müller notes several forms that derive from the original Germanic name for the bear (which comes in two variants, the n-stem *beran- and its u-stemmed extension *ber(a)nu-, is present),⁶³ and declares the parallel drawn between the forms *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn* to be legitimate (cf. above all the Old Norse personal name Biarnheðinn).

In an article published in 1968 in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, Heinrich Beck - whose doctoral thesis from 1965 on the *Ebersignum in Germanic* made an important contribution to the study of animal symbolism in the ancient Germanic world - devotes himself to a thorough analysis of the religious significance of the matrices of Torslunda.⁶⁴ Beck emphasizes above all the Odinic character of the warriors (*úlfheðnar*) clad in wolfskins - a view shared by Karl Hauck, among others, in his studies on the iconology of Germanic pictorial monuments.⁶⁵

In his *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Jan de Vries agrees with the main features of Otto Höfler's argument. He links these bands of berserkers above all with the traditional elements that were adopted in the north from the old Germanic followers⁶⁶ - before the profound renewal of the institution of followership by the first Christian rulers.

Martha Paul, who examined the function of canids in ancient Germanic cultures from a profane and religious perspective in a comprehensive overview published in 1981 (*Wolf, Fuchs und Hund bei den Germanen*), was also influenced by Höfler's theses.

Hans Kuhn, who was critical of the theories of the Viennese mythological school, again subscribed to the old etymology by Noreen. In an article published in 1968 on "Kämpfen und Berserker"⁶⁷, the German philologist draws a daring parallel between the Old Frisian *berskinze* and the Old Norse *berserkr* and emphasizes that the animal warriors in Old Norse literature are often referred to as *kappar* ("warriors"). According to Kuhn, the berserkers are only a special variant of the professional fighters, who depicted as Scandinavian descendants of the Roman gladiators.⁶⁸ This comparison is based on the Icelandic sources, in which the animal warriors are described in a

62 Cf. Müller 1967, 1968 and 1970.

63 Müller 1970, § 10 f.

64 Beck 1968a.

65 Hauck's work is presented in more detail in Chapter IX.

66 Cf. de Vries 1970, 1, § 333 ff. and 406 ff.

67 See also the earlier, Icelandic version of this article: Kuhn 1949.

68 In an earlier article, Kuhn describes the berserkers as professional warriors "who formed the core troops of the fiefdoms until the Viking Age" (cf. Kuhn 1938, p. 101).

appear in an extremely unfavorable light. Apparently, however, it is contradicted by other, much older skaldic traditions. Incidentally, Kuhn implicitly admits to considering only one particular aspect of the phenomenon when he writes: "The explanation of the word that I advocate does not exclude the possibility ancient native elements also entered into berserkdom and the later conceptions of it. Here, however, it is a matter of working out what is connected with the combs (and the gladiators)." However, Kuhn ascribes only a subordinate value to the "ancient native elements" and prefers the Roman origin.

Kuhn's thesis was taken up again by the archaeologist Egon Wamers (2009). Although he offers a very pointed critique of the "shamanic" thesis, he is less convincing as soon as he turns against the central role of the Óðinn in the tradition of the animal warriors - a problem he dismisses without proper discussion. Wamers devotes little attention to the beliefs associated with the transformation of the "soul excursion"⁶⁹ and so important in the Old Norse world. The idea of a Germanic imitation of the Roman practice of gladiatorial combat - which can be supported above all by comparing Roman and Germanic pictorial representations - seems extremely simplistic: how can the existence of figures comparable to the berserkers be explained in the oldest Indo-European cultures?⁷⁰ Although Kuhn postulated the primacy of Latin influences, he was much more cautious when he a possible fusion with the Germanic heritage. Klaus von See (1961b), who was also very skeptical about Otto Höfler's work, did not deny the significance attributed to the phenomenon of martial ecstasy in Old Norse society.⁷¹ However, he sees the terms *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar* as simple poetic images created by the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi: "For I believe that *berserkr* in *Haraldskvæði* is not a fixed term at all, but - just like *úlfheðinn* - an invention of the poet Þórbjörn".⁷² According to von See, the Old Norse word *berserkr* was ascribed an appellative value relatively late, favoured by the generalization of the theme in the Icelandic sagas (see Ch. II below). The German humanities scholar does not formulate a thesis on the way in which the animal warriors - whose existence he admits - were referred to in pagan Scandinavia. Nor does he comment on various eponymological evidence that supports the ancient use of the Old Norse name *Úlfheðinn* - or other related Germanic forms.⁽⁷³⁾

69 Cf. Hasenfratz 2005, pp. 38-41 (§ 4. Concepts of the soul in the Germanic realm).

70 Cf. the works by Wikander, Dumézil and Kershaw cited above.

71 Cf. von See 1961b, p. 134.

72 Cf. von See 1961b, p. 133.

73 Three people of the 10th century bearing this name appear in the *Landnámabók* (cf. Blaney 1972, p. 24). Jakob Grimm was one of the first to recognize the importance of the Old High German language.

Peter Buchholz (1968) takes a completely different perspective in his study on the shamanistic traits in ancient Icelandic lore. The author, who is concerned with uncovering the existence of elements belonging to circumpolar cultures in the beliefs of the old Norse, sees the berserker as a "warlike shaman". However, if the frenzy that characterizes the animal warriors does indeed resemble an ecstatic trance, the suddenness of these attacks does not testify to a "shamanistic technique". At least the medieval literary sources provide no evidence for the use of such a technique. The usual equipment of a shaman - such as a drum - is completely absent here. Another "magical" competence that is usually attributed to shamans seems to justify Buchholz's proposed comparison between Old Norse and Sami beliefs: It is about the journey of the soul outside the human body in the form of an animal. It must be noted, however, that the phenomenon does not manifest itself in the shamans in the same way as in the animal warriors: the hero Kveld-Úlfr, who is described in the *Egils saga* as mjök *hamrammr*, does not resort to magical practices; his "second", innermost being manifests itself spontaneously, very suddenly, unintentionally and unconquerably (see Chapter IV above). The overly systematic parallel drawn by Buchholz between the Scandinavian and Sami areas thus quickly reaches its limits, especially when an attempt is made to apply it to the berserkers⁽⁷⁴⁾.

Buchholz's "shamanistic" thesis,⁷⁵ which follows the investigations of Dag Strömbäcks on the magical practices of *seiðr*⁷⁶ owes much the work of the Frenchman Régis Boyer (1986)⁷⁷ and the British Neil S. Price (2002). It was, however, utilized by François-Xavier Dillmann, who in his book on the magi in ancient Iceland conducted a thorough investigation of the

Grimm 1842 and 1875-1878, 2, p. 916. Many related examples can be found in the registers of Adolf Socin (1903) and Ernst Föstermann (1901). 74 Buchholz nevertheless interprets the *Ynglinga saga* correctly when he writes: "'*Fara brynjlausir*' does not necessarily mean nakedness; it only means that the berserkers do not wear armor in the usual sense" (Buchholz 1968, p. 68). In fact, the absence of armor does not necessarily imply the practice of fighting *nudis corporibus* - animal fur can take the place of other protective equipment. Incidentally, the compound *ber-serkr* and the adjective *brynjlausir* cannot have the same meaning: The Old Norse *serkr* does not correspond to the Latin *lorica*, but to *tunica*, as Sveinbjörn Egilsson has made clear, rejecting the etymology based on *ber-* (*nudus*).

75 See also Buchholz 1971.

76 Strömbäck 1935.

77 In contrast to Buchholz, Boyer does not explicitly see the berserkers as shamans; however, he supports the thesis of a direct influence of shamanism on magical practices and beliefs in ancient Scandinavia.

⁷⁸The comparatist Georges Dumézil also takes a reserved position on the question of possible influences of shamanism⁷⁹ and attempts to place the tradition of animal warriors in a larger context that encompasses the entirety of Indo-European societies. The French scholar was interested in the warrior mythology of the ancient North from the very beginning of his research. In *Mythes et dieux des Germains*, published in 1939, he defines the berserkers as the "earthly counterparts" ("doublet ter- restre") of the *einherjar*.⁸⁰ Dumézil also deals with this topic in a subsequent work to the "aspects mythiques de la fonction guerrière"⁸¹. The idea of a parallel between the *berserkir* and the *einherjar* was taken up again by Andreas Nordberg (2003) in his work on the representations of the afterlife and the warrior cults in the Old Norse religion. According to Nordberg, the ritual feasts by local rulers at certain times of the year in pre-Christian Scandinavian society influenced the notions of Valhalla, which seen as an image of the royal hall in the world of the gods. Conversely, the members of the retinue - especially the berserkers - could see themselves as genuine incarnations of the Odin troupe on such occasions.

In 1972, the American Benjamin Blaney wrote a doctoral thesis on the subject of "Berserkers in Old Norse literature". He adopts Sveinbjörn Egilsson's etymology and analyzes the vocabulary in connection with animal warfare and animal transformation. Blaney relies on the interpretation of the texts, but also examines the archaeological evidence, in the tradition of Höfler's and Hauck's work. He attempts to prove the legacy of ancient initiatory rites in some medieval sources and blames the Christianization of the north for the demise of the phenomenon. Ten years after the publication of this work, Blaney revisited the question of literary stereotypes in connection with the berserkers in an article in *Scandinavian Studies*⁸², before summarizing his opinion on the subject in the 1993 encyclopedia *Medieval Scandinavia*.

⁷⁸ Dillmann (2006, p. 261 f.), who clearly distinguishes the berserkers from sorcerers, points to the connection between the tradition of animal warriors, Odin mythology and pre-Christian kingship.

⁷⁹ Cf. Dumézil 1997, p. 72. Polomé 1992 is also skeptical of a shamanistic interpretation of Germanic religion (cf. also Schjødt 2001). Hultkrantz 1973 and Francfort / Hamayon 2001, among others, argue for a differentiated use of the term "shamanism".

⁸⁰ Dumézil 1939, p. 81.

⁸¹ Dumézil 1985, et al. p. 207 f.

⁸² Blaney 1982.

Several recent studies provide a more or less complete summary of Icelandic sources that mention the figure of the berserker. In addition to the cited article by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, the contributions by Gerd Kreutzer (1977), David J. Beard (1978), Otto Zitzelberg (1979), Åke V. Ström (1982) and Gryte Piebenga (1993)⁸³ as well as the dissertation written by Gerard Breen in 1999 under the title *The berserkr in Old Norse and Icelandic Literature* should be mentioned in particular.

In this study, Breen offers a thorough examination of the medieval corpus (especially the *Vorzeitsagas* and *Riddarasögur*) as well as some later texts such as the *Rímur*. He is also concerned with the eponymic tradition, which he had already dealt with in detail in an article in *Studia anthroponymica Scandinavica* in 1997. Without dismissing the ethnographic and comparative evidence, Breen regards the berserker as "primarily a literary figure".⁸⁴ He attempts to list the various topoi associated with the beast warriors and at the same time gives equal attention to each of the stereotypes examined. No aspect is neglected, none is favored. The complexity of the literary tradition is perfectly presented, as is the diversity of possible interpretations. However, this view hardly contributes to a historical reconstruction, to which Breen attaches only secondary importance. The British researcher accuses the various theories and attempts at interpretation that have been put forward since the 17th century of having a very hypothetical, often biased character compared to the only objective, reliable data available in the medieval sources - hence the pessimistic assessment: "The berserkr might never be critically fathomed as a historical, religious or mythical phenomenon."⁸⁵ According to Breen, it is inadmissible to make a selection from the medieval works by juxtaposing the "late" representations with the "authentic" traditions - a procedure that shows a lack of "critical acumen".⁸⁶ This judgment seems very strict: the review of the texts represents only one step in the investigation and must not be sufficient in itself. Assessing the documentary value of a source is part of the essence of historical criticism. It is true that it is by no means an exact science whose task would be to produce definitive results. Should the possibility of historical interpretation nevertheless be dispensed with? The methodological

83 Cf. Kreutzer 1977, Beard 1978, Zitzelberg 1979, Åke Ström 1982 and Piebenga 1993. See also Pastré 1992 and 1994, Toubert 1996 and Grundy 1998.

84 Breen 1999a, p. 193.

85 Breen 1999a, p. 5.

86 Breen 1999a, p. 195.

Prudence must not prevent the historian from formulating hypotheses and ultimately taking a stand.

Michael P. Speidel, who is less reserved about the possibility of a historical interpretation of the tradition of animal warriors, extends the field of his investigation to the entirety of the Indo-European world in his 2002 work entitled "Berserks: A History of Indo-European 'Mad Warriors'". This article offers a very rich overview of the traditions with the *furor heroicus*. In contrast to Georges Dumézil, however, Speidel relies on a very broad definition of the term *berserkr* - and thus risks mixing the archetype of animal warriors with very distant traditions. Although the *berserksgangr* represents a phenomenon of martial ecstasy, this finding should not lead to the assumption that all wild warriors of antiquity were to be understood as berserkers. The comparative approach is absolutely legitimate; however, some methodological principles must be observed: Not least, one should avoid generalizing the use of a technical term that is normally associated with a particular culture or epoch. This procedure runs the risk of blurring the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation more than the comparative approach justifies.

In a study on the *Ancient Germanic warriors* published in 2004, Speidel returns the subject of animal warriors. As a specialist in Roman military history, he proposes a typology of different "classes" of barbarian warriors, which is largely on an iconographic analysis of the Trajan's Column. According to Speidel, the "naked berserkers" on the monument are associated with the "wolf- and bear-warriors". This terminology does not always make it possible to determine the exact category to which the berserkers of the Scandinavian sources belong. Speidel's book nevertheless contains stimulating views on the "Germanization" of the Roman army. This approach is by its originality, as it comes at a time when the mainstream historical research is more focused on the spread of Roman culture in the Nordic world.

In their 2004 book *Oden och Mithras- kulten*, Olof Sundqvist and Anders Kaliff put forward the thesis of an influence of the Mithraic religion on the cult of Wotan.⁸⁷ Without denying the autochthonous character of the latter, the authors believe that Germanic beliefs were able to develop further in the course of the first centuries of our era as a result of intercultural contacts, especially at the Limes: The spread of the Mithraic cult, which great popularity among the Roman legionaries, can be seen in this

87 Cf. also Sundqvist / Kaliff 2006, in which both scientists have summarized their arguments.

region can be traced very well. For Sundqvist and Kaliff, the similarities between the two traditions include the "initiation rituals" and "zoomorphic" figures as well as a clear warlike character: the later Old Norse *berserkir* or *úlfheðnar*, who are "consecrated" to Óðinn/Wotan, are compared here with the *mithrae milites*. However, this seductive parallel is based on elements that are difficult to prove: The lack of written sources, combined with the paucity of archaeological evidence, does not allow a definitive conclusion to be drawn. Due to the very patchy sources, the origin of the berserker tradition cannot be traced back to the Roman Iron Age - which does not mean, however, that one can necessarily conclude *ex silentio* that it originated at a later date.

Nevertheless, one must take into account the development of animal style in Germanic ornaments (ancient Germanic animal ornaments), which began around the 5th century, in order to see the artistic expression of a spiritual world emerge that shows a demonstrable affinity to the tradition of animal warriors - a development that has been analyzed by the Danish archaeologists Karen Høiland Nielsen (1999) and Lotte Hedeager (2004). For the preceding epochs we have to rely on conjecture: At best, we find some early indirect traces of the wearing of masks in a cultic or warlike context (such on the Scandinavian rock paintings of the Bronze Age, see Chapter IX below). These indications - however they may be interpreted - are hardly sufficient to achieve certainty.

The Swedish religious historian Britt-Mari Näsström (2006) has compiled the most important archaeological data and literary sources in her book *Bärsär- karna, vikingatidens elitsoldater*. This study, which is intended for a wide audience and therefore does not contain a detailed critical examination of the texts, points to the historicity of the phenomenon of animal warriors. The author mentions both Sundqvist's "Mithraic" thesis and Jens Peter Schjødt's research on initiation rites in the Old Norse religion. Schjødt, for his part, emphasizes the close connection between the Berserkers and the Óðinn cult - a view that was reaffirmed at the 13th *International Saga Conference* in 2006,⁸⁸ in response to a short critical Anatoly Liberman⁸⁹ published at the previous conference. Schjødt addressed this issue in his dissertation, which was published in 2008 in

88 Cf. Schjødt 2006, p. 5: "Those who venerated Óðinn were those who were initiated . . . to the god. And they were those who could expect to go to Valhöll after their death . . . Being initiated, however, also means passing through some kind of liminal sphere . . . It is in this connection that we must view the animal properties of the warriors".

89 Liberman (2003) is skeptical about the often postulated theory of a connection the traditions of the Berserkers and Odin mythology. Liberman repeats his argument in a chapter of his collection of essays on Old Scandinavian and Germanic mythology.

The book was published in detail in an English translation under the title *Initiation between two Worlds*.

In her habilitation thesis published in 2009, which is dedicated to the concept of ecstasy in medieval sources, Christa Agnes Tuczay deals primarily with the analysis of the phenomenon of trance, not only in connection with the *berserksgangr*, but also in the area of magical and divinatory practices⁽⁹⁰⁾.

A dissertation by Heiko Hiltmann published in Bamberg in 2011 presents the Old Norse animal warrior narratives as a purely literary construct. In essence, Hiltmann's argument is contradicted by the present study.⁹¹In an essay published in 2015 entitled "Northern Anger: Early Modern Debates on Berserkers", Bernd Roling pursues a historiographical approach. The author mainly deals with the history of the different models of interpretation of the *berserk gangr*, which are based on demonology, pathology or toxicity.

cology.⁹²

In a study published in 2019, Rebecca Merkelbach presents her views on "Shape, Monstrosity and Berserkism in the *Íslendingasögur*" focuses the Old Norse sources that describe the berserk as a "monster" ("ogre")⁽⁹³⁾ Obviously, the interest in the fascinating figure of the animal warriors in research,⁹⁴ and constantly new, often contradictory interpretations. Today it seems necessary to approach the amount of data anew, with the aim of outlining a coherent historical reconstruction. The concept of "heroic frenzy" refers to different manifestations in the Indo-European cultures - especially in the Germanic world. May the present "case study" on the Old Norse berserkers contribute to the understanding of this complex phenomenon - knowing full well that such an investigation must be restricted to a strictly limited chronological and geographical framework, without, however, refraining from some comparisons with neighboring areas.

Mythology, Literature and Culture (Liberman 2015, pp. 101-112: Chapter 3: "Óðinn's Berserks in Myth and Human Berserks in Reality").

90 Tuczay 2009. On the terms "ecstasy" and "trance" see, among others, Arbman 1963-1970; Holm 1982.

91 Hiltmann 2011.

92 Roling 2015.

93 Merkelbach 2019.

94 A previously unpublished dissertation entitled "Berserkir, a Re-examination of the phenomenon in literature and Life" was defended by Roderick Dale at the University of Nottingham in 2014 (Dale 2014). According to Dale, the "real" berserkers of the Viking Age did not in fact indulge in frenzy. According to his interpretation of the an. sources, the *berserksgangr* was not a genuine fit of rage, but a cultic attitude intended to strengthen the courage of the animal warriors. Three other studies, one in Italian and two in Polish, could not be consulted by the author (Oitana 2006, Malinowski 2009 and Szczygielska 2010).

to prohibit. In the following pages, an attempt will be made to examine the relevant sources independently of predetermined patterns of interpretation (based, for example, on the influence of psychic pathology, the use of hallucinogens, shamanism, the imitation of ancient models or the interpretation of all Old Icelandic mythological tales as purely literary constructs) - a methodological approach that it possible to examine the medieval tradition with regard to the cultic-religious dimension of the phenomenon under investigation. The analysis of etymological questions naturally forms the first step of this approach.

Chapter II

Etymological interpretation of the appellatives

berserkr and *úlfheðinn*

In the Old Norse sources, there are two names explicitly for animal warriors: the composites *ber-serkr* (pl. *berserkir*) and *úlf-heðinn* (pl. *úlfheðnar*).

The frequency with which the noun *berserkr* appears in Icelandic sagas is considerable. Depending on the work, however, the use of the word refers to very different figures - some of them are inspired by historical models and based on authentic traditions, others are stereotypes of a purely legendary nature.

The term *úlfheðnar* occurs much less frequently in the corpus of medieval literature. It is always used for elite warriors clad in wolf pelts and described in a precise historical context: They form a small group of animal warriors in the service of the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri, whom they accompany in battle. The members of this bodyguard are also described as berserkers in skaldic verses from the late 9th century (*Haraldskvæði*, Str. 8, 20 and 21).¹

The close connection between the two terms seems to be explicitly confirmed by two Icelandic sagas (cf. *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, chap. II and *Vatnsdæla saga*, chap. IX). However, it remains difficult to determine with certainty the historical value of these accounts, which were written between the 13th and 14th centuries: Are the authors content paraphrase the skaldic verses? Do they have additional information, written or oral, that we do not know? Without neglecting the transmission of these reports, which will be examined more closely in the course of this work⁽²⁾ it seems appropriate at this point to first present the etymological findings before a critical examination of the *Haraldskvæði* - the primary literary source for the phenomenon of the berserkers.

A Etymological study of the appellative *úlfheðinn*

The compound noun *úlf-heðinn* combines two masculine nouns. The first describes the wolf (an. *úlf*), the second refers to a garment made of skin or fur (an. *heðinn*). This term is sometimes used as a generic name

1 For the dating of the various skaldic fragments that make up the *Haraldskvæði*, see chap. III below.

2 chapter IV.

(in the plural form *úlfheðnar*), but sometimes also as a male name (*Úlfheðinn*). However, the sources do not allow us to distinguish whether one of these forms clearly preceded the other.

The element *úlfr* comes from the Germanic **wulfaz* (aschw. and adän. *ulver*, goth. *wulfs*, asächs. *wulf*, fris. and ahd. *wolf*).³ The wolf appears in several Germanic name formations. It is often associated with terms that a martial connotation, such as the Old Norse words *brynja*, "brünne", *geirr* "spear", *gunnr* "fight, battle", *herr* "army, troop" etc. (cf. above all the Old Icelandic names *Bryniólfr*, *Geirúlfr*, *Gunnúlfr*, *Heriúlfr* etc.).⁴ This is an old tradition, as can be seen from the beginning of the 6th century onwards in the runic inscriptions of St. John the Baptist.⁵ In addition, some compound forms point to the idea of a metamorphosis, a change of appearance (cf. an.)⁶ - or more specifically to the imitation of the behavior of a wild animal (cf. alam. *Wolfdregi*,⁷ Franconian, Bavarian, alam. *Wolf-gang*)⁸ as well as the wearing of a "mask" (cf. an. *Grímólfr*, **Úlfgrímr*).⁹ The origin of the name *Úlf-heðinn* certainly belongs in this context.

3 Cf. also Indo-European. **w/qʷos*, Sanskrit *vrka*, Greek *λύκος*, Latin *lupus*, Old Slavonic *vluku* etc. (cf. de Vries 1962, p. 633; Müller 1970, p. 4).

4 Müller 1970, pp. 4-10 and 178 f. The close connection between the Germanic theriophore names and the sphere of warfare is documented by *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum* - a commentary on the Gospels from the 5th century. Its author presents this tradition as an expression of the barbarian warriors' animalistic fury: *sicut solent et barbarae gentes nomina filiis imponere ad devastationem respicientia bestiarum, ferarum, vel rapacium volucrum, gloriosum putantes filios tales habere, ad bellum idoneos, et insanientes in sanguinem* (sp. 626 f.; cf. Beck 1965, p. 98 f.; Müller 1970, p. 178).

5 These are three inscriptions in southern Sweden (Blekinge, Lister county). On questions relating to the names of these monuments, Williams 2001; Sundqvist / Hultgård 2004.

6 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 216 f. The element *-hamr* corresponds to the noun *hamr*, with the meaning "the external form of the soul", "form assumed after a transformation" (cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 421; Fritzner 1886-1896, 1, p. 718).

7 The second member of this name "can be placed as a nomen agentis to got. *þragjan* 'to run'" (Müller 1970, p. 213).

8 From the Germanic *gangan*, "to walk" (cf. Förstemann 1901, sp. 1649; Müller 1967, p. 209; Müller 1970, p. 154). Like *Wolfdregi*, the name *Wolfgang* "referred to the ecstatic fighting gait of the animal warriors, comparable to running amok, to the *berserksgangr*, as Snorri Sturluson calls it" (Müller 1970, p. 213).

9 Cf. Feilitzen 1937, p. 399. The element *-grímr* must be connected with the noun *gríma*, "mask" (Germ.

**grīma*), cf. an. *Grímólfr*, as. *Wulfgrim*, Frank. *Grimolf* or the medieval first name *Isangrim*, which also to the wolf (cf. above all *Ysengrin* from Renard's novel). There are several similar constructions with various animal names: Frank. *Eburgrim*, an. *Biarngrímr/bair*. *Peragrim*, an. *Arngrímr/Frank*. *Argrim* etc. (cf. Müller 1967; Müller 1970, p. 218 f.).

The word part *héðinn*, which derives from the Germanic **heðanaz*¹⁰, occurs like the element *úlfr* in several compounds of personal names (Biarnheðinn, Skar-pheðinn etc.)¹¹ or as a *simplex*: an. Heðinn, adän. Hithin, aschw. Hithin/Hethin;¹² cf. also Frank. Chedinus and thüring. Hedinus.¹³ The appellative *héðinn* has the same meaning as the Latin *pellis*. In his 1919 study to the history of clothing in medieval Norway and Iceland, Hjalmar Falk notes the metaphorical meaning of the Icelandic expression *vefja heðni at hqfði einhverjum* ("to blind", "to deceive someone", "to deceive about appearance"), the first meaning of which is "to tie skin around someone's head" (cf. *Gretti's saga*, chap. LXIII). According to Falk, this is an allusion to magical practices.¹⁴ The Old Norse *héðinn* - probably related to the word *haðna* ("goat", from the Germanic **haðinōn*)¹⁵ - corresponds to the Frankish *hetan*, as well as the Old English *heden*, *hæðen*: "fur dress, hood with shoulder collar".¹⁶ According to Jan de Vries, *héðinn* refers to a "short garment without sleeves but with a hood made of fur".¹⁷ The term *úlf-heðinn* thus refers to a man dressed in a surcot (sleeve tunic) made of wolf fur - this is confirmed by the description in the *Vatnsdæla saga* (chapter IX): þeir *hqfðu vargstakka fyrir brynjur* ("they had wolf-skin woolls as breasts").¹⁸

The morphology of the Old Norse *úlf-heðinn* resembles, as Hans Kuhn and Gunter Müller have emphasized,¹⁹ the adjectival compounds under the term *bahuvrīhi* - after the Sanskrit word that represents the prototype for these word formations²⁰. The meaning of such possessive compounds does not correspond to the sum of the meaning of their individual members, but to a quality or characteristic that characterizes a living being (or an object) implicitly meant by them:²¹ In the case we are concerned with, it is neither a matter of describing a "wolf" (*úlfr*)

10 Müller 1970, p. 200.

11 Müller 1970, p. 202.

12 Müller 1967, p. 201 f.; Müller 1970, p. 214; Peterson 1998.

13 Müller 1970, p. 214; cf. also the Frankish forms *Hedan*, *Hetan* (Förstemann 1901, sp. 805 f.; Kaufmann 1968, p. 181 f.).

14 Falk 1919, p. 190.

15 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 200; Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, p. 312; Breen 1999a, p. 7.

16 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 215. Falk 1919, p. 190 points out that the Old English *heden* is rendered in some glosses by the Old English *cuculla*.

17 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 215.

18 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24. The preposition must be understood here in a metaphorical sense: "instead of . . .", "instead of . . ." (cf. *IED*, p. 182 and Güntert 1912, p. 20).

19 Kuhn 1968, p. 222; Müller 1967, p. 200.

20 Sanskrit *bahuvrīhi* "who] owns a lot of rice", i.e. "rich".

21 Cf. the definition by Stenzler 1980, p. 65: "Bahuvrīhis are adjectivally used compounds with a noun in the final element. They receive their gender from another term to which they are an attribute".

nor a "fur garment" (*héðinn*), but a "man clothed in a wolf's pelt" - that is, an animal warrior.

Parallel to the use of the generic name *úlfheðinn* in Icelandic sources, the male name *Úlfheðinn* is attested on the Scandinavian peninsula until the end of the Middle Ages - mainly in Sweden⁽²²⁾.

Two pieces of epigraphic evidence have come down to us: An epitaph on a 13th-century grave slab contains the name *uluepin*,²³ while the older form *ulfhþin* occurs on the stone of Igelsta (Sö 307)²⁴ - a memorial that is without doubt one of the oldest Swedish inscriptions in the younger *futhark* and probably dates from the 10th century²⁵.

The origin of the male name *Úlfheðinn* is therefore old, but cannot be determined with certainty. It is probably not Proto-Germanic, but only arose after the dissolution of the Germanic language unit: The reconstructed Proto-Germanic form **Wulfa-hedanaz* deviates from the regular morphology of Proto-Germanic compounds in that the second member **hedanaz* is not two-syllable⁽²⁶⁾.

The continental Germanic forms, which are related to the Old Norse *úlfheðinn*, generally belong to the Frankish and Bavarian areas (*Wolfhetan*, *Wolfhetin* etc.). They are attested above all in diplomatic sources of the 8th and 9th centuries.²⁷ Although this type of name, which is also borne by clerics - such as *Hedenwulf*, Bishop of Laon in the 9th century⁽²⁸⁾ (cf. Förstemann 1901, sp. 806) - obviously no longer has any reference to warlike animal masking in the Carolingian period.

This eponymic evidence nevertheless appears in an area geographically adjacent to the Alamannic region, in which some even older archaeological finds have been made that date to the 6th or 7th century: the sword sheath from Gutenstein and the bronze fragment from Obrigheim. The ornamentation on these pressed plates shows warriors dressed in wolf pelts. The same iconography appears on other contemporary finds: on the Anglo-Saxon press-plate model from Fen Drayton, as well as on one of the matrices from Torslunda, which was discovered on the Swedish island of Öland. As this evidence proves, the wearing of animal skins belongs to a clearly pagan sym-

22 Cf. Müller 1967, p. 201, who mainly quotes the "late" Swedish forms: *Vlwiden*, *Vlwidin*, *Vlwiden* (after Lundgren / Brate / Lind 1892-1934, p. 289).

23 Inscription U 799, parish of Långtora, district of Lagunda, Uppland, cf. Wessén / Jansson 1949-1951, pp. 398-401, pl. 113.

24 Cf. Brate / Wessén 1924-1936, I, p. 283 f., 2, pl. 155 (cf. also Pl. 13 with the reprint of a woodcut from Johan Göranson's *Bautil* published in 1750).

25 The lack of any decoration, as well as the angular contours of the runic band, seem to be characteristic of this era.

26 Müller 1967, p. 210; Müller 1970, p. 213; Schramm 1957, p. 20.

27 Cf. Müller 1967, p. 201.

28 Cf. Förstemann 1901, p. 806.

bolik, which both a martial and a cultic meaning. The etymology of the name *Úlfheðinn*/*Wolfhetan* is directly reminiscent of these practices, which are well documented in the context of pre-Christian Germanic cultures.

Did this naming tradition appear on the continent before it spread to the Scandinavian peninsula? According to Gunter Müller, this tradition goes back to the cultural currents of Southwest Germanic origin, which exerted a strong influence on Nordic culture during the Migration Period.²⁹ However, this argument, tempting as it may be, is not decisive. In fact, there is no reason not to regard the male name *Úlfheðinn* as the Norse variant of a Common Germanic onomastic tradition, without assuming the transmission of a continental Germanic name type. Even if the forms *Úlfheðinn* and *Wolfhetan* are only attested in certain language areas,³⁰ theriophore personal names - especially those referring to the wolf - are widespread throughout the Germanic world.³¹

The thesis of an early use of the forms *úlfheðinn*/*Úlfheðinn* in the ancient north can therefore not be ruled out, even if no pre-Wiccan epigraphic source provides definitive evidence for this.

By comparing archaeological and genealogical evidence, Blaney³² comes to the conclusion that the use of the generic name precedes that of the male name. The Norse sources provide no reliable evidence for this. It can only be concluded that the runic inscription from Igelsta cannot be much older than the *Haraldskvæði*: the younger *futhark* did not arrive in central Sweden before the end of the 9th century, an epoch which in Norway corresponds to the first decades of the reign of King Haraldr hárfagri⁽³³⁾.

The more or less simultaneous use of the generic name in Norway³⁴ and the male name in Sweden can at best be explained by the existence of a common, already ancient tradition: In contrast to Klaus von See's suggestions, it does not necessarily have to be a "poetic invention" inspired by continental models that could be attributed to the Norwegian skalds.

²⁹ Müller 1967, p. 210 ff.

³⁰ The use of the compound *Úlfheðinn*/*Wolfhetan* is not documented among the Frisians or in the Saxon region.

³¹ Müller 1970, pp. 4-10.

³² Blaney 1972, p. 34.

³³ Breen's view (1999a, p. 6), according to the inscription on the Igelsta stone predates the creation of *Haraldskvæði*, therefore seems at least questionable.

³⁴ According to the traditional dating of *Haraldskvæði*, according to which the stanzas handed down in Icelandic sources are attributed to poets of the late 9th century.

Despite the uncertainties surrounding the origin of the name, the etymological interpretation of the compound *úlf-heðinn* ("wolf's clothing [of skin]", "wolf's pelt", i.e. "wolf warrior") does not present as many difficulties as the appellative *berserkr*.

B The controversial etymology of the appellative *berserkr*

Two different interpretations, both based on solid philological arguments, have been opposing each other for over a century.³⁵ The first thesis, became established in the middle of the 19th century, links the Old Norse adjective *berr* ("naked") with the masculine noun *serkr* ("shirt"). The adjective does indeed appear in several compound forms.

The second theory, put forward in 1860, identified an old etymon for bear in the root **ber*. This theory had superseded the previous one for more than half a century until Erik Noreen published an article in 1932 entitled "Ordet bärsärk" the journal *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*. His investigation supports the first theory with new arguments. Since then, this question has been the subject of controversial debate.

Before critically the two theses, we should first recall several flawed attempts at interpretation made by the pioneers of Nordic philology towards the end of the 17th century.

1 The first interpretations

In fact, several etymological interpretations ended in a dead end. Three of them mainly used the key element *-yrkja*: these are the forms *berjask-yrkja*, *berds-yrkja* and *berse-yrkja*.³⁶

The etymology of *berjask-yrkja* presupposes a very unlikely combination of the mediopassive *berjask* (Latin *pugnare*) and the verb *yrkja* (English "to work"). This interpretation, which Olaus Verelius put forward in his first edition of the *Herva-*

³⁵ Cf. e.g. the short summary of these etymological interpretations in Ade 1954.

³⁶ We will not dwell here on Finnur Magnússon's theory (quoted in Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1860, p. 51), which connects the Old Norse *berserkr* with a "Persian" form *bezerk/bezrek* (in the sense of *grandis*, *magnus*). This interpretation can perhaps be explained by the incorrect spelling in some Icelandic manuscripts: In stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði*, the *Flateyjarbók* offers the reading *besserk[ir]*, cf. *Harald's þáttir hárfagra*, p. 573 and the facsimile edition by Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1930. As it is also noted by Breen (1999a, p. 7), other incorrect spellings of the same word appear in more recent poems (*Grettisrímur*, p. 71 and *Griplur*, p. 366), among others.

rar saga is put forward as an alternative to the theory of the warriors "ohne Brünne" (*brynjulausir*): "Dicuntur autem *berserki*, quod *brynio-lau- sier*, h. e. sine lorica fuerint, vel â *berias & yrkia* q. *bersyrker*; quod semper ad pugnas prompti fuerint."³⁷ Despite its philological untenability, Verelius' proposal was nevertheless considered by Jacob Isthmén Reenhielm,³⁸ Erich Ramelius,³⁹ Olof Dalin⁴⁰ and Johan Ihre⁴¹.

The etymology *berds-yrkja* appeared in 1769 in the *Glossarium Suigothicum* by Johan Ihre. The element **berd-*, which the author translates as "pugna"⁴², is not documented in Old Norse literature. The Swedish lexicographer undoubtedly refers to the Old Icelandic *bardagi* ("battle").⁴³ Here, too, the element *-yrkja* does not integrate satisfactorily into the formation of the compound.

The etymology *berse-yrkja*, which was proposed by Haquin Spegel⁴⁴ in 1712 before it was included in the *Glossarium Suigothicum*⁴⁵, gives a foretaste of one of the two interpretations that later prevailed: it actually establishes a reference to the name of the bear (cf. the diminutive form *bersi*, which is attested both as a designation and as a male name).⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the use of the verb *-yrkja* in this and also in the previous cases is not convincing.

37 *Hervarar saga* (Olaus Verelius (ed.) 1672), p. 36; cf. also the same author's edition of the *Gautreks saga* (Olaus Verelius (ed./trans.) 1664, p. 98); cf. also Verelius 1691, p. 33.

38 In an edition of Þorsteins saga *Vikingssonar*, which follows the edition of *Ketils saga hængs* published by Rudbeck, cf. Rudbeck et al. (eds.) 1695-1697, pp. 48 f.

39 Ramelius 1725, pp. 3 and 5.

40 Dalin 1747-1762, I, p. 259 f., no. 1.

41 Yours 1769, I, p. 172.

42 Your 1769, p. 172: "... si modo berd vel bard pro pugna acceptum auctoritate vetustatis niteretur".

43 As Breen 1999a, p. 11 notes, Ihre may also have been thinking of the Old Icelandic word *barði*. This term actually appears in one of the *Pulur* of the *Snorra Edda* (IV, r, 2) as one of the poetic terms for 'shield' (*Skj.* A:1, p. 667, B:1, p. 665). However, it is a metaphorical meaning: in Old Norse prose literature, the term *barði* usually denotes a warship with a reinforced prow (*ONP*, 2, p. 43; *IED*, p. 52; the Old Norse *barð* denotes, among other things, the prow of a ship). Breen also compares an. *barði* with lat. *barditus*. This word appears in several manuscripts of *Germania*, III, where it refers to the war cry uttered by the Germanic tribes as they roar against the edge of their shields. However, some copies of the text provide other readings, among which the word *bar(r)itus* (literally: "cry of the elephants") appears. In the writings of Latin historians, this expression often refers to a war cry (cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, XVI, xii, 43; XXI, xiii, 15; XXXI, vii, 11; Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, III, 18). However, none of the interpretations proposed for the word *barditus/barritus* is entirely convincing (cf. Much / Jankuhn / Lange (eds./trans.) 1967, pp. 77 f.; Beck 1976; Springer 2004).

44 Spegel 1712, p. 34.

45 Yours 1769, I, p. 172.

46 While Spegel gives a correct form of the diminutive *bersi*, yours oddly identifies it with lat. *lupus*.

Johan Ihr's *glossary* also refers to a fourth etymological interpretation inspired by a handwritten note by Lars Neogard⁴⁷. This freely invented etymology relates the word *berserkr* to a form *berr-sorkr*. In the Gotlandic dialect, *sorkr* is said to have denoted a "young man", to which Johan Ihr's commentary refers: "Si hoc adoptas *Berserkr*, nil aliud erit, quam juvenis bellator".⁴⁸ The first element (*berr-*) seems to correspond to the Old Norse adjective *berr* ("naked" or "unprotected") - according to an interpretation that had already been proposed in the 17th century by the Icelander Guðmundur Andrússon (Gudmundus Andreæ).

2 The "classic" interpretation based on the adjective *berr-* (*nudus*)

In his *Lexicon Islandicum*, Guðmundur actually defines the *berserkr* as warriors without armor: "Miles qui sine armoris, lorica Galea, &c. pugnat, à *Ber* / nudus, & *serk*, indusio"⁴⁹ - an image also used by Arngrímur Jónsson (1568-1648), one of the most famous scholars of the North⁽⁵⁰⁾.

As we have seen, Verelius links the compound *berserkr* with the adjective *brnyjulauss*, "without breastplate", "without any armor" - an interpretation based on the *Ynglinga saga* (chap. VI).

In the essay "De Berserkis & furore berserkico", which appeared in 1773 in the appendices to the Arnamagnæan edition of the *Kristni saga*,⁵¹ Jon Erichsen⁵² considers the following etymology: "a ber nudus, & *serkr*, proprie indusium, sed poetice lorica, quad hominem loricâ non indutum significat". Among other things, the author refers to the form *berbrynjaðr* - a participle that occurs in the *Svarfdæla saga* (ch. XV) with the meaning "without breasts".⁵³

According to Erichsen, the meaning of the name *berserkr* is explained by the custom of throwing away the shield or getting rid of any protection before rushing into battle.

47 Cf. Lars Neogard, *Gautau-Minning* (Wollin (ed.) 2009, p. 281). This manuscript is described in the *Herka manuscript collections* at the University Library in Uppsala.

48 Yours 1769, I, p. 172.

49 The book was published by Resenius almost 30 years after the author's death (1654).

50 *Ad catalogum regum Sveciæ annotanda* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1950, p. 459).

51 Hannes Finsson (ed./trans.) 1773, pp. 142-163.

52 It is the Icelander Jón Eiríksson (1728-1787), whose name is quoted in Danish.

53 Cf. the note by Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 161. In version *A* of the *Guðmundar saga biskups* (Jón Sigurðsson / Guðbrandur Vigfússon (ed.) 1858, p. 541; cf. also Stefán Karlsson (ed.) 1983, p. 227), however, the word occurs with the meaning 'armed only in a coat of mail' (cf. *ONP*, 2, p. 226).

There is no doubt that the animal warriors - whether they were protected by a pelt or not - despised the use of protective equipment in the heat of battle. This custom, which is well documented in Old Norse sources, is not unique the berserkers: According to Snorri Sturluson's accounts, which are supported by older skaldic stanzas, several Christian Norse lords made use of this practice on the battlefield.⁵⁴In some sagas, the adjective *hli(ð)arlauss* (literally, 'without protection', meaning 'without defensive weapons'; from fem. *hlífð*, 'protection, defense') is indeed with berserkers. However, these works mostly belong to the genre of prehistoric sagas (*Fornaldarsögur*).⁵⁵Due to their dubious historicity, it does not seem appropriate to rely exclusively on these traditions.

The reputation of invulnerability attached to berserkers in several medieval texts⁵⁶probably reinforced the conviction of 17th-century scholars: such warriors, impervious to the bite of iron or fire (cf. the formula *hvarþki eldr né járn orti á þá*), feel no need to wear armor.

Furthermore, ancient historiography also reports on the Celtic or Germanic custom of fighting "naked" (*nudis corporibus*).⁵⁷In modern times, this practice was associated both with the topos of *furor teutonicus* and with the Old Norse *berserksgangr*.⁽⁵⁸⁾

54 At this point it is necessary to attention to the fourth stanza of the *Hákonarmál*, in which the skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir describes King Hákon góði, who tears off his armor before the battle of Storð: *Hrauðsk ór hervøðum, / hratt á vøll brynju / vísi verðungar, / til vígs toeki [. . .]* ("He took off his battle dress, / he threw his bride on the ground, / the leader of the followers, / before he began the battle"). Snorri quotes this verse in the *Hákonar saga góða* (chap. XXX, p. 212). This episode is exemplary of the warlike behavior described by Jon Erichsen, although in this specific case there is no direct connection to the *berserksgangr*: King Hákon, who had received a Christian upbringing at the English court, was certainly no animal warrior. According to Skaldic tradition, Magnús góði (cf. *Magnúss saga góða*, ch. XXVIII) and Haraldr harðráði (cf. *Haralds saga harðráða*, ch. XCI) also laid their breasts on the battlefield.

55 Especially *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. XX (Rafn (ed.) 1830), *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. XVIII, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, ch. VII.

56 Cf. *Ynglinga saga*, ch. VI: *þeir drápu mannfólkit, en hvarþki eldr né járn orti á þá* ("they killed , but neither fire nor iron could harm them"). For other sources see Boberg 1966, p. 124 (F610.3 Invulnerable berserk); Breen 1999a, p. 53 f.; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, Chapter VII of this work examines the motif of the invulnerability of the beast warriors in more detail. On the themes of invulnerability in the Old Norse sources, see Beard 1981.

57 The quote comes from Tacitus (*Historiae*, II, xxii). He reports in connection with the Germanic cohorts of Vitellius that they fight *more patrio nudis corporibus*.

58 This thesis was only recently by Speidel 2002, pp. 253-290: As he does not hesitate to apply the term 'berserk' outside the Scandinavian realm, his comparisons to examine the various manifestations of battle frenzy in the Indo-European world often seem very daring.

Consequently, for the followers of this etymology, the reference to the adjective *berr* primarily includes the idea of fighting without armor. Depending on the interpretation, the masculine *serkr* is used either in a metaphorical sense (="armor"; *berserkr*= "without armor")⁵⁹ or in the literal sense (*serkr*= "shirt"; *berserkr*= "with bare shirt"). In the first case, *berr* has an exclusive character, and the construction obtained by combining the two elements can be associated with the forms *ber-brynjaðr* (part. praet. or adjective, "without breast") or *ber-skjaldaðr* (adjective, "without shield")⁶⁰. These terms are relatively rarely in the sagas. In the second case, a connection can be made between the generic name *berserkr* and the adjective *ber-kyrtlaðr* ('with bare gown')⁶¹, so that a parallel with frequent adjectival forms becomes apparent, such as *ber-beinn* or *ber-leggr* ('with bare legs'), *ber-fættir* ('barefoot'), *ber-hendr* ('with the bare hand'), *ber-hqði* ('bare-headed').⁶² Both interpretations necessarily lead to the same result. Rudolph Keyser also remarks in connection with berserkers: "I Striden fore de frem brynjeløse, i den bare Serk, eller Kjortel, deraf uidentvivil deres Navn."⁶³ The definition of "berserker" as "warrior without armor" has convinced many scholars since the 17th century until the publication of the *Lexicon poëticum* by Sveinbjörn Egilsson in 1860.⁶⁴

3 The etymon **ber-* (*ursus*) and Sveinbjörn Egilsson's interpretation

Sveinbjörn Egilsson, who breaks with the traditional etymological interpretation of the name *berserkr*, suggests that the origin of the compound can be found in an archaic form for the name of the bear: "a *berr* v(el) *bera*, ursus, ura, et *serkr*, tunica, vestis".⁶⁵ This thesis, which also taken up shortly afterwards by Guðbrandur Vigfússon in the *Icelandic-English Dictionary* and Theodor Wisén⁶⁶, established

59 On the metaphorical use of *serkr* in skaldic poetry (*kenning* for a "back"), see Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 490.

60 Cf. *Njáls saga*, ch. LXIII.

61 Cf. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (Ólafur Halldórsson (ed.) 1958), p. 361 (see also *ONP*, 2, p. 247).

62 For references in connection with these adjectives, see *IED*, p. 60 f. and *ONP*, 2, p. 225 f.

63 Cf. Keyser 1847, p. 126. Erik Noreen (1932, p. 253) agrees with this opinion.

64 Cf. especially Guðmundur Magnússon in the first volume of the Arnarnagðnæan edition of the Eddic poems (1787, p. 435); Björn Halldórsson 1814, p. 73; Petersen (transl.) 1839-1844, 1, pp. 295-99 ("Om Berserker og Berserksgang"). Björn Halldórsson provides the following definition: "indusio tantum non lorica indutus, *uden Brynie, Panser, blot i Underklæder*".

65 Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1860, p. 51.

66 In Linder et al. (eds.) 1876-1899, 2, p. 354 f.

quickly developed. In the first volume of his large Old Norse dictionary published from 1886 onwards, Johan Fritzner⁶⁷ defined *berserkr* as a warrior "klædt i björnaskind, af *ber-* og *serkr*".

The interpretation based on the etymon **ber* (*ursus*) avoids the problem of ambiguity, which speaks against the previous thesis. However, it does overcome another difficulty: the Old Norse name *björn* (cf. isl. and schw. *björn*, dan. and norw. *bjørn*) has been attested for the bear since a very early epoch. The element **ber-* does not as a *simplex* in either the epigraphic or literary sources, not even in the form **berr*, which is reconstructed by the author of the *Lexicon poëticum*. The reference to the feminine *bera*, which denotes a female bear, also does not allow us to explain the origin of the masculine *ber-serkr*.

However, the feminine *bera* confirms the existence of an etymon **ber-* (*ursus*), which is older than the Old Norse *björn*. Both forms correspond to two competing variants of the Common Germanic name for the bear:⁶⁸ the *n-stem* Urgerm. **beran-* and its *u-stem* extension urgerm. **ber(a)nu-*.⁶⁹ The first of these two forms has prevailed in most Germanic languages, with the exception of the Nordic area, where the second form dominates. While ae. *bera* and ahd. *Bero* ("bear") are derived from **beran-*, the form **ber(a)nu* led by refraction⁷⁰ to ae. *Beorn*⁷¹ or to an. *björn*. Both variants were used in both continental West Germanic and Old Norse

67 Fritzner 1886-1896, I, p. 45.

68 Müller 1970, p. 10. The Indo-European roots for the word bear (**rksos* or **rksos*, cf. Po-korny 1959-1969, I, p. 875), which is particularly evident in Latin *ursus*, in Sanskrit *Rkṣa*, in Greek ἄρκ(τ)ος or in Celtic *Artos*, did not for long in the Germanic languages, in which the animal is designated by its color (the "brown one", **bhero*). This peculiarity seems to have developed from a taboo that probably derives from the role that the bear in the beliefs and archaic cults of the north. In this context, some scholars have interpreted the name *Yrsa* (mother of the legendary Danish king Hrólfr kraki) as "she-bear". Much 1936, p. 550, traces this name back to an Urgerm. form **ursjōn*, which he compares with Latin *ursus* and regards as evidence of the Latin-Germanic linguistic unit (cf. also Much 1915, p. 68). Schröder 1957, p. 204, assumes a direct derivation from Urgerm. **urhsjōn* (see also Blažek 2017, pp. 168-170). For other interpretations see, among others, Olrik 1903a, p. 149 f.; Müller 1970, p. 18; de Vries 1962, p. 679.

69 A similar phenomenon can be observed in the two Proto-Germanic forms for the eagle: **aran-* on the one hand (cf. ahd./ae. *aro*, an. *ari*) and **ar(a)nu-* on the other (cf. an. *orn*, ahd. *arn*, ae. *earn* etc.). Cf. Müller 1970, p. 35.

70 This is the diphthongization caused by the following *a* or *u*, after which *-e* changes to *-ja* or *-jo/-jō*: cf. **bernu* **beurnu* **beurn* > > *björn*. Some personal names that are derived from the words derived from the *-n* stem have undergone a comparable development in Old Norse, cf. *bjari* or *bjarki*. Certain phonetic factors, such as phonetic similarity, can prevent breaking (or introduce it in an unexpected way), which leads to the emergence of double : *berg/bjarg*, *spell/spiall* (cf. Noreen 1923, p. 61).

71 It should be noted, however, that the *-u*-stemmed form *beorn* is no longer used in Old English for the name of the bear: It is preserved exclusively in the *-n*-stemmed form *bera*.

⁷²Although the -u stem predominates in Old Norse naming, traces of the -n stem are recognizable: awn./adän. *Beri*, *Bjari*, *Bersi*, awn. *Berki*, *Bjarki* (with diminutive *k*-derivation) etc.

The form *björn* was undoubtedly created quite early. The thesis put forward by Sveinbjörn Egilsson therefore implies an early date of origin of the generic noun *ber-serkr*.⁷³ It is impossible to give a more precise date based on the occurrence of the element -*serkr* ("shirt") - the origin of which cannot be precisely determined.⁷⁴

Since the Old Norse form *ber-serkr* has not survived in any other Old Germanic language, it can be assumed that this generic name only came into being in the Proto-Norse period.

The situation is quite different for the anthroponym *Úlfheðinn* - as attested by the existence of the personal name Wolfhetan in the Frankish region. However, this name is not attested as a generic name in the continental Germanic languages, unlike the Old Norse *úlfheðinn*. A similar name formation occurs in Icelandic sources, but it refers to the name for the bear: *Bjarnheðinn*.⁷⁵

fert. In the Old English poetic language, *beorn* in turn denotes the "warrior" (cf. Müller 1970, pp. 11 and 12; Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, 1, p. 86). Beck proved in his 1965 study on the boar signum, certain animal references are of great importance in the warlike and religious symbolic world of Germanic cultures.

72 Müller 1970, p. 10 f.

73 Höfler 1976, p. 303; Müller 1970, p. 222 f.

74 Cf. Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, p. 806 as well as de Vries 1962, p. 471: "the history of the word is not completely clear". Some scholars regard the noun as a borrowing from Aslav. *sraka*, *skraky* (cf. Miklosich 1886, p. 316; Solmsen 1893, p. 275) or Russian *sorok* (cf. Pedersen 1906, p. 370). Falk / Torp (1903, p. 153), on the other hand, attribute a Germanic origin to the Slavic vocabulary. Nevertheless, the most commonly held thesis remains that of the borrowing of Latin *serica* ("[clothing made of] silk"), via the later Latin *sarcia* (cf. Brøndal 1917, p. 182; Holthausen 1948, p. 240; Alexander Jóhannesson 1956, p. 786 f.; Anderson 1990; Orel 2003, p. 319). If one accepts this theory, the term must have come into use among several Germanic peoples before the 6th century: according to Prokop's tradition (*De Bellis*, IV, 6), the Vandals wore a garment at this time they themselves called Σηρικῆ. The Old Norse *serkr* is in any case attested in Skaldic poetry from the 9th century onwards - among others in *Haraldskvæði* (with the compound *ber-serkr* in stanzas 8 and 20, but also through the phrase *serkir hringofnir* in stanza 19; for further references see Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 490). On the type of clothing for which the term is used, see Falk 1919, p. 140 f.

75 Cf. *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), pp. 66, 69; Lind 1905-1915, 2, sp. 1049 ff. The *Bjarnheðinn* Sigurðarson mentioned in the *Landnámabók* was, however, a Catholic priest (an. *prestr*) from the 12th century.

If the Old Norse appellative *berserkr* can be derived from the root **ber* (*ursus*), the forms *ber-sekr* and *úlf-heðinn* are two parallel formations denoting fur-clad warriors.

However, the term *berserkr* does not always seem to have retained this original meaning: In the 13th century, the Icelandic *sagnamenn* no longer recognize the old etymon **ber-*, which they confuse with the adjective *berr* (*nudus*). Snorri Sturluson ascribes *berserksgangr* to the warriors "without breasts" (*brynjulau-sir*). The period in which this semantic development took place cannot be precisely determined.

The memory of the original etymology still seems to be present in the skaldic poetry of the 9th century. One of the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* describes with striking expressiveness the "growling" and "howling" by the beast warriors: *grenjuðu berserkir, [. . .] / emjuðu úlfheðnar*. If one assumes that the use of the compound *berserkr* alludes to the archaic name of the bear, the juxtaposition of the two expressions creates an impressive image. This stylistic approach does not contradict the thesis of a more general use of the word *berserkr*, which in the time of King Haraldr hárfagrís was no longer reserved for warriors clad in bearskins, but possibly referred to all angry fighters or animal warriors - as suggested by stanza 21 of *Haraldskvæði*, in which the *berserkir* also called *úlfheðnar*: *Úlfheðnar þeir heita* (cf. also *Vatnsdæla saga*, chap. IX: *þeir berserkir, er Úlfheðnar váru kallaðir*).⁷⁶

The trace of a relatively "late", uninterrupted use of the root **ber-* (*ursus*) in the formation of Old Norse composites up to the Viking Age is also preserved in the vocabulary of Eddic poetry, which also transmits the adjective *berharðr* and the noun *berfjall*. The first term is attested in the *Atlakviða* (Str. 38, 7), the second in the *Völundarkviða* (Str. 10, 1). The two works, which were included in the compilation of the *Codex Regius* in the 13th century, were probably written towards the end of the 9th century. They are thus contemporaries of the first skaldic sources in which the beast warriors are mentioned (above all *Haraldskvæði*). Even if the meaning of the adjective *berharðr* ("hard [i.e. powerful] like a bear"), incidentally a *hapax legomenon*, is undisputed, that of the noun *berfjall* is sometimes unclear: it can be translated as "bearskin" (from **ber-/ursus* and *fjall, fur/pellis*)⁷⁷, but in modern Icelandic it has the meaning

⁷⁶ Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24; for the two sources see below (chap. III on *Haraldskvæði* and chapter IV of the *Vatnsdæla saga*).

⁷⁷ IED, p. 60. To support the interpretation of *fjall* as *fell/pellis*, cf. the verb *fjalla*, "to cover, to clothe with fur", or the adjective *bláffallaðr*, "of black color", attribute for a raven in a *Lausavísa* (1) by the skald Hrómundr halti (*Skj.* A:1, p. 95, B:1, p. 90).

"rocky hill" (literally "bare mountain", from *berr/nudus* and *ƿfall, fell/mons*).⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the first solution seems to suggest itself in the context of *Vǫlundarkviða*.⁷⁹ The etymology of the term *berharðr* shows a clear analogy to that of the Germanic male name Bernhard. Nevertheless, it does not seem necessary to assume a continental influence on the Scandinavian vocabulary with Klaus von See: The Old Norse genealogical material offers other examples attesting to the use of the etymon **ber-/ursus*.

The runic inscriptions testify to the existence of the root **ber-* for a very early stage of the Norse languages: A runic inscription from the 6th century (DR 195), which can be seen on the handle of a wooden knife found in the sacrificial bog of Kragehul, most probably contains the personal name Bera. According to current interpretations, the word must be read as a *simplex*, or also as part of a compound [. . .] *umabera*.⁸⁰

In addition to the feminine Bera⁸¹ - which can also be used in various combinations⁸² - the names Bersi and Bessi also appear.⁽⁸³⁾ These two personal names, which are formed with the diminutive suffix *-s*, are also used as generic names in the Old Norse sources and denote the bear.⁸⁴ Masculine diminutives only rarely derive from the name of a female person: One must therefore assume a masculine **beri* (cf. also adän. Biari⁸⁵ and Beri,⁸⁶ aschw. Berse and Besse,⁸⁷ an. Bjar-móðr⁸⁸ etc.)⁸⁹ as the origin of these two forms. Very old place names such as the Danish *Biærkelev*⁹⁰ confirm the archaic character of the diminuti-

78 *IED*, P. 60.

79 See von See 1961b, p. 133 and Hesselmann 1945, p. 79.

80 Müller 1970, p. 12, note 35; Stoklund 2001. The inscription on the knife shaft of Kragehul provides more reliable evidence than the very hypothetical biari of the Rök stone (Ög 136, beginning of the 9th century), the interpretation of which is disputed (cf. Breen 1999a, p. 18, note 97 and the literature cited there; Reichert 1998, p. 89 f.).

81 Cf. Lind 1905-1915, 1, sp. 122; Rygh 1901, p. 33.

82 Müller 1970, p. 17; Lind 1905-1915, 1, sp. 63, 436, 455; 2, sp. 1143. In Old High German this compound form is also well attested, among other things by the endings *-birin*, *-pirin* (cf. Müller 1970, p. 17; Förstemann 1901, sp. 259 f.).

83 Lind 1905-1915, 1, pp. 132 f.; Lind 1931, pp. 163-168; Björkman 1910, p. 27; Müller 1970, pp. 224-230.

84 *ONP*, 2, P. 260; *IED*, P. 61.

85 Lind 1905-1915, 1, sp. 135; Knudsen / Kristensen / Hornby 1936-1964, 1.1, p. 122.

86 Knudsen / Kristensen / Hornby 1936-1964, 1.1, p. 112.

87 Lundgren / Brate / Lind 1892-1934, p. 28.

88 Lind 1905-1915, sp. 135; de Vries 1962, p. 39.

89 For further references, see Müller 1970, p. 12 f.

90 Cf. Knudsen et al. (eds.) 1922-2013, 5, p. 178; Müller 1970, p. 226; Breen 1999a, p. 18.

ven forms on *-k* (an. *Biarki*⁹¹ and *Berki* or Adanish/Ashwedish *Biaerke*). All these data prove the existence of an Old Norse etymon **ber-*, which can be recognized as the first member in the compound *ber-serkr*.

Beyond the purely etymological arguments, this interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the *berserksgangr* is explicitly compared to the behavior of wild animals in some Old Norse sources (cf. *Ynglinga saga*, chap. VI).

In the course of this work (see Chapter IV below), some Old Norse genealogies - both authentic and fictitious - will also be mentioned, which have been handed down in the context of Berker stories and are characterized by a sequence of theriophore personal names. These genealogies contain, among other things, bipartite names whose etymological interpretation refers to the idea of an animal transformation or animal disguise. That these are purely "metaphorical elements of a poetic language" without reference to any pre-Christian belief or cultic tradition (as Gottfried Schramm believed),⁹² seems very unlikely, as this poetic metaphor cannot be clearly separated from ritual animal symbolism.⁹³

Certainly, there are only a few explicit references to the animal symbolism of the Ber-serks in the rich corpus of Icelandic sagas. However, it should be noted that these medieval texts, which were written well after the Viking Age, do not always allow us to understand the nature of the beliefs and religious practices on which the phenomenon of animal warriors was - at least originally - based. The often much older archaeological finds (sword sheaths from Gutenstein, bronze fragments from Obrigheim, matrices from Torslunda, pressed sheet metal models from Fen Drayton, etc.) offer pictorial evidence in this respect that proves valuable for the interpretation of the later written records. All this evidence encourages us to agree with Sveinbjörn Egilsson's etymological interpretation. Nevertheless, his thesis has with fierce criticism, especially from the Swedish philologist Erik

91 In Old Icelandic literature, the diminutive *biarki*, which is associated with the heroic figure *Bǫðvarr*, probably refers to the miraculous origin of the son of Björn and Bera: like his father, who transformed into a bear at the time, *Bǫðvarr biarki* has the ability to appear in animal form. This legend, which told in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*, is demonstrably based on a much older tradition: in the version that has come down to us, the original meaning of the *cognomen biarki* seems to have escaped the author of the saga, who makes no allusions to it. The Old Icelandic text (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 61; Slay (ed.) 1960, p. 68) only mentions that the hero has a sword sheath made of birch wood (an. *bjǫrk*) (cf. Müller 1970, p. 227; Kahle 1910, p. 232). According to Olrik (1903a, p. 139 f.), *biarki* is the hero's actual name, while *Bǫðvarr* is only an epithet.

92 Schramm 1957, p. 78.

93 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 194.

Noreen, who resolutely defends the old etymology based on the adjective *berr* (*nudus*)⁽⁹⁴⁾.

4 The controversy

Noreen disagrees with the interpretation of *berserkr* as "bear shirt" (schw. "björnsärk" or "björnskjorta") for two reasons: The thesis seems questionable to him for etymological reasons and unrealistic for factual reasons⁽⁹⁵⁾.

Noreen's first argument, which is of a purely philological nature, is primarily based on the observation that the etymon **ber-* (*ursus*) is rare in Old Norse word formation.

As far as the morphology of the appellative *berserkr* is concerned, according to Noreen, no parallel can be drawn with the word *úlfheðinn*, since this approach necessarily leads to considering the compound *ber-serkr* ("bear shirt", schw. "björn- skjorta") as an elliptical form derived from a more complex compound (an. **ber-[skinn]-serkr*, "bear[skin]-shirt", schw. "björn[skinns]skjorta"). However, there is no evidence of such a compound in the Old Norse language.

Noreen's second argument is based on practical considerations. He considers the use of bearskins by angry warriors to be very implausible, as skins of this kind are too "thick, heavy and warm"⁽⁹⁶⁾.

The bas-relief on Trajan's Column depicts warriors of a - in all probability ⁹⁷ These iconographic representations can be placed in a historical context that is far removed from the Viking Age; nevertheless, they lend a certain probability to the image of the berserker clad in a bearskin. Furthermore it is possible that the 'hooded' animal warriors only wore certain pieces of fur (*pars pro toto*) instead of complete bearskins or even replaced these heavy furs with other, 'lighter' types of fur (such as goat furs). goat furs), knowing full well that the masking essentially had a symbolic value: the (archaic) mask cults were not primarily concerned with the realistic imitation of an animal's appearance, but rather with making visible the innermost, wild nature of the masked person (an. *hamr*, see Chapter VII.B.2 below.) to be made visible. Consequently, Noreen's reservations about the hypothesis of the tra-

94 Noreen 1932, p. 254: "den gamla etymologien är den rätta". This position was also taken by Hans Kuhn (1968).

95 Noreen 1932, p. 251: "formellt osäker och sakligt icke övertygande".

96 Noreen 1932, p. 252: "tjockt, tungt och varmt".

97 Cf. Speidel 2004, p. 39 f.

The use of bearskins by Old Norse warriors is by no means decisive for the etymological interpretation of the word *berserkr*.

The Swedish philologist nevertheless adopts the interpretation based on the use of the adjective *berr* (*nudus*): He proposes to regard the word *berserkr* as *bahuvrihi* or to compare the construction of this common noun with that of the adjective *ber-beinn* (bare-legged). It must be noted, however, that the generic name *berserkr* is never used adjectivally - at most as a *cognomen* alongside various anthroponyms.⁹⁸ Noreen the image of the "bear warriors" and emphasizes that Sveinbjörn Egils-son's etymology contains no explicit reference to an animal transformation: The expression "Bear shirt" ("björnskjorta") could not refer to a man "who takes the form of a bear" ("en mann i björnhamn"). This statement does not appear to be valid, as an examination of the genealogical material shows: Several Germanic names that the wearing of furs or masks refer only purely metaphorically to a change in appearance (cf. z. e.g. ahd. *Wolfhroc*: in the first meaning "[someone who wears a wolf's coat]", i.e. a warrior disguised as a wolf).⁹⁹

Although he does not rule out a possible connection with lycanthropic beliefs (schw. "varulvstro"), Noreen prefers the definition of the *beserkr* as a warrior who fights "with a bare shirt" ("i bara särken"). To support his opinion, he mentions the behavior of King Hákon góði, who strips off his armor before the battle of Storö. However, this reference is not entirely conclusive: This famous episode immortalized in a stanza of the *Hákonarmál*, gives us no reason to consider the Norwegian king a berserker.

Erik Noreen's article is limited to philological questions and does not consider the archaeological finds in any way. The author ultimately interprets the *berserksgangr* as a kind of hysterical illness.¹⁰⁰ By essentially following the arguments of the Norwegian Fredrik Grøn regarding the pathologi-

98 Cf. e.g. Argrímr berserkr in the *Hervarar saga*, Eysteinn berserkr in the *Víga-Glúms saga*, Háki haðaberserkr and Hildibrandr berserkr in the *Heimskringla* etc. This usage can also be verified by some Norwegian diplomatic sources, which, however, have no connection to the tradition of the beast warriors (see Ch. VII below).

99 Cf. Müller 1967, p. 202 ff. The element *hamr* ("appearance assumed during a transformation", "outer form of the soul"), on the other hand, is only rarely documented for the formation of Old Norse personal names: The Old Norse name *Úlfhamr* provides the only certain evidence. Gunter Müller suggests adding a collection of Germanic names related the Old Norse *Hemingr* to this root. However, the etymological interpretation of this name is disputed (Müller 1970, p. 215 f.).

100 Noreen 1932, p. 253.

character of the *berserksgangr*,¹⁰¹ Noreen clearly rejects the thesis developed by Lily Weiser-Aall of a connection between ancient Germanic initiation rituals and the tradition of animal warriors⁽¹⁰²⁾.

The same approach is taken by Hans Kuhn (1968), who is extremely averse to any religious interpretation of the phenomenon, in his article "Kämpfen und Berserker".¹⁰³ Kuhn takes up one of Noreen's fundamental objections, according to which the first member of the compound *bersekr* cannot be traced back to the etymon **ber-* ("bear"), since this etymological interpretation would presuppose the contraction of an unattested form **ber-skinns-serkr* ("bearskin shirt").¹⁰⁴ In addition, such a construction consisting of three elements is not a correct *bahuvrihi formation* (in contrast to the compound *úlf-heðinn*). Kuhn therefore translates *barhemd* ("without-shirt").

The declension of the noun *berserkr*, whose genitive singular is *berserks* (whereas the masculine *serkr* is more often declined as *serkjar*), leads Kuhn to regard this generic name as an old adjective formation along the lines of *ber-beinn* or *ber-leggr*. This assumption is not confirmed by any medieval source.

By drawing a parallel with the term *berskinsze*, which in the Old Frisian legal texts is associated with the idea of the "fighter" (an. *kappi*), Kuhn equates the animal warriors with professional duellists, to whom he ascribes a very modest status in Old Norse society.

In the course of this work, reference will again be made to this contestable interpretation, which pushes aside or denies several essential aspects of the Berserker tradition - above all their close connection with pre-Christian forms of allegiance⁽¹⁰⁵⁾.

First and foremost, however, philological objections must be raised against the arguments of Noreen and Kuhn. As Gunter Müller's studies of the names prove, the interpretation *ber-serkr* (engl. "bear shirt", schw. "björnskjorta")¹⁰⁶ without justifying the contraction of an unattested

101 In the etymological questions, Grøn (1929a, p. 6) again seems to refer to Johan Fritzner's interpretation: "kriger klædd i bjørneskinn".

102 Noreen 1932, p. 247, note 2 to the work of Lily Weiser-Aall, *Altgermanische Jünglingsweißen und Männerbünde*.

103 The article first appeared in Icelandic (Kuhn 1949).

104 Kuhn 1968, p. 222.

105 The depiction of ring swords in the motifs of Gutenstein, Obrigheim and Torslunda is a convincing indication of the connection between the beast warriors and the archaic form of Germanic allegiance (cf. Steuer 1987). The literary Scandinavian sources, of which the *Haraldskvæði* is one of the most important, confirm the presence of berserkers among the Norse aristocracy, and even among the kings.

106 Müller 1970, p. 222 f., no. 103.

form **ber-/skinns/-serkr* (German "Bären[*fur*]hemd", Swedish "björn[*skinns*]skjorta").

In fact, the Old Norse *serkr*, which normally means "shirt, tunic", sometimes takes on the meaning "fur, pelt" in poetic language.

In *Háleygjatal*, which was written towards the end of the 10th century by the skald Eyvindr Skáldaspillr¹⁰⁷, the expression *hoss serkr hrísgrísnis* ("gray shirt of the wolf") occurs (Str. 8). This poetic paraphrase (*kenning*) obviously refers to a wolf's fur.¹⁰⁸ Gunter Müller also mentions the compound *íárn-serkr*, literally "iron shirt", which according to the author describes the "with iron-colored fur", i.e. the "wolf".¹⁰⁹ This term appears in a verse of the *Ketils saga hængs* (IV, 2),¹¹⁰ which was probably written in the 13th century. In this context, however, Müller's interpretation is uncertain: the *íárnserkir* worn by the warriors are not necessarily wolf skins; in the same stanza, the poet uses the terms *skynnkyrtill* ("tunic of skin") and *hringskyrta* ("ring shirt", "brünne"). The word *íárnserkr* may therefore simply refer to chain mail (an interpretation taken up by Finnur Jónsson¹¹¹ and Rudolf Meissner¹¹²). Moreover, the *Ketils saga hængs* belongs to the genre of prehistoric sagas; the stanzas quoted in this Icelandic text were written several hundred years after the *Haraldskvæði*. This evidence therefore seems less convincing than the example from the *Háleygja valley*.

In addition to the poetic sources, there is another special use of the Old Norse *serkr*, which Müller does not mention: the masculine *serkr* ("shirt") can also denote a "certain amount of fur pieces" (cf. the expression *fjóra tigi serkja grárna skinna*)⁽¹¹³⁾.

Gunter Müller's most convincing argument, however, is the parallel he draws between the Old Norse form *berserkr* and the Old High German first name *Wolfrhroc*.¹¹⁴ Various variants of this personal name appear in medieval diplomatic sources from the 8th century onwards in the Franconian and Germanic languages.

107 On the skald Eyvindr, cf. e.g. Marold 2006.

108 The etymology of the word *hrísgrísnis*, which refers to the wolf, is disputed. According to de Vries, the compound could be translated as "the animal living in the forest, showing its teeth" (cf. de Vries 1962, p. 257; Krause 1990, p. 167 f.). According to Beck (1968a, p. 247 f.), the eighth stanza of *Háleygjatal* describes an extremely traditional motif, the depiction of which can already be found on the matrices of Torslunda: that of the warrior dressed in a wolf skin who follows the one-eyed god of war Óðinn onto the battlefield (see chapters VI and IX below).

109 Müller 1970, p. 223.

110 *Skj.* A:2, p. 282, B:2, p. 303 and *Ketils saga hængs*, p. 126.

111 Cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 329 (cf. Danish "jærnsærk", "jærnbrynje").

112 Cf. Meissner 1921, p. 164.

113 *Knýtlinga saga* (af Petersens / Olsen (ed.) 1919/1926, chap. LXXXVIII, p. 204 or in Bjarni Guðnason (ed.) 1982, p. 246 f.); cf. also *IED*, p. 523 and Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, p. 806 f.

114 Müller 1970, p. 222 f., note 103.

Germanic, Bavarian, Alemannic and Lombard regions.¹¹⁵ Müller translates this name as "Wolf-Rock".

This interpretation is clear, even without assuming the contraction of an , unattested form of the type **Wolfs*[fur]rock.

In addition, the first name *Wolfhroc* clearly appears as a variant of the traditional motif represented by the name *Wolfhetan*, similar to the Old Norse *Úlfheðinn*.

The construction of the generic name *berserkr* therefore probably originated from a synecdoche: "bear shirt" for "bear [fur] shirt". It should also be noted that there is a comparable rhetorical figure in the appellative *vargstakkr* ("wolf's coat", i.e. "wolf's [fur] coat"), which in the *Vatnsdæla saga* (chap. IX) refers to the fur garments of the *úlfheðnar* in the service of King Haraldr.

Gunter Müller's position, which we are happy to endorse, was particularly well received by Otto Höfler⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

However, the philological debate does not end with the problems of etymological interpretation alone. In fact, Klaus von See a hypercritical position by questioning the affiliation of the generic names *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn* to the early language stage of Old Norse and considers them to be purely poetic terms invented by the Skald Þórbjörn hornklofi towards the end of the 9th century⁽¹¹⁷⁾.

According to Klaus von See, this thesis of a Skaldic invention can explain the very limited use of the etymon **ber-* (*ursus*) in Old Norse as well as the "late" introduction of the term *berserkr*, which, with the exception of *Haraldskvæði*, does not occur in surviving skaldic poetry before the 12th century. The German philologist wants to trace the construction of the Old Norse *ber-* *serkr* (as well as that of the adjective *berharðr* or the noun *berfjall*) back to the imitation of foreign models, which originate from the linguistic treasure of the continental Germanic poetic language: The Norwegian skald, who was inspired by the style and themes of Germanic heroic poetry, had himself coined the new terms *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn*, which only much later - due to the integration of the skaldic tradition saga literature - had passed into general Icelandic usage.

Klaus von See attributes the *Atlakviða* poem to Þórbjörn hornklofi⁽¹¹⁸⁾ in which the adjective *berharðr* appears. He also considers the *Völundarkviða* - in which the name *berfjall* appears - to be a contemporary work.

115 Cf. the forms *Wolfhroc*, *Wolfro*, *Hrocculf*, *Hroccolf*, *Hrocholf*, *Rocculf* etc. (Müller 1967, p. 202 ff.; Müller 1970, p. 212 f.).

116 Cf. Höfler 1976, pp. 298-304.

117 Cf. von See 1961b.

118 Cf. von See 1961b, p. 133. This thesis was also put forward by Felix Genzmer in 1926.

However, these arguments stand on shaky ground: if we follow the manuscript sources, stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði* is sometimes attributed to Þórbjörn horn- klofi (according to Snorri Sturluson), sometimes to Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni (according to the *Fagrskinna* and the *Flateyjarbók*). As the author of the *Atlakviða*, the medieval manuscripts give us no indication of his identity.

The *Atlakviða*, like the *Völundarkviða*, borrows names and motifs from the continental Germanic tradition. However, this interplay of influences does not make it possible to explain all the lexical peculiarities of ancient Eddic poetry.

The parallel between the Old Norse adjective *berharðr* and the Germanic male name Berhard (or its various variants: Frankish, Alam., Bavarian, Langob., as. Berahard, Perahart, Berinhard, Bernhart etc.)¹¹⁹ is not necessarily meaningful: the adjectival use of this form is not documented outside the Norse world; moreover, the Old Norse given name that imitates the continental model is Biarnharðr.¹²⁰

Furthermore, the Old Norse form *ber-serkr* has no equivalent in the other Germanic languages.

Klaus von See's thesis therefore seems very daring. Certainly he does not go so far as to deny the phenomenon of animal warriors any historical reality ("It should be emphasized once again that the existence of ecstatic warriors . . . should not be denied"); however, he rejects the existence of a type of warrior who was called *berserkr* in the Viking Age ("there was no type of warrior who bore the technical designation berserker"). In Klaus von See's eyes, the terms *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar* in the context of the *Haraldskvæði* are simple poetic idioms: "both expressions are poetic paraphrases".¹²¹ According to this thesis, the use of these two words as proper generic names stems from a late literary tradition that originated in the late 12th century at the earliest. As far as the word *úlfheðinn* is concerned, this position proves untenable, since the personal name Ulfhiþin occurs on the Swedish rune stone of Igelsta, which dates from the end of the 9th or beginning of the 10th century. The use of the noun *úlf- heðnar* in a contemporary skaldic verse can therefore not originate purely from the poetic invention of a Norwegian skald: The spread of this term in the Scandinavian world undoubtedly did not occur in the time of Haraldr hárfagri, but much earlier. As a result, the theory that the word *berserkr* was "invented" by the scalde Þórbjörn hornklofi loses all probability: the word *berserkr* is demonstrably based on an Uralic form formed from the etymon **ber-* (*ursus*).

119 Müller 1970, p. 151; Förstemann 1901, pp. 262, 269.

120 Müller 1970, p. 151; de Vries 1962, p. 39 (cf. ahd. *Berinhard*).

121 Cf. von See 1961b, p. 134.

The examination of certain eponymological data can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon to which the term *ber-serkr* is linked - provided that reliable criteria for distinguishing the significant elements from the rich list of Old Germanic personal names are established.

Among the large number of Germanic names reminiscent of animals (bear,¹²² wolf,¹²³ dog,¹²⁴ boar,¹²⁵ stag,¹²⁶ birds of prey,¹²⁷ snake or dragon ("worm")¹²⁸ etc.), only a small number actually have their origin in cultic practices and religious beliefs.¹²⁹ In fact, the etymology of these names is usually explained by the composition of common onomastic elements (which animal names, but also names of gods and weapons as well as the designation of certain physical or mental characteristics), which are often passed on within a gender as part of a family tradition. In addition, the use of such personal names can also be explained by a metaphorical intention, which is intended to show a certain analogy between the abilities of an animal and those of a human being (strength, skill, fighting spirit, etc.). However, the formation of some composites which philologists refer to as "primary formations"¹³⁰, is part of a process that goes back further and corresponds to an early stage in the development of Germanic cultures. Some of these names implicitly refer to the wearing of masks or animal skins - a martial custom that is clearly attested by some pictorial representations of the Vendel and Viking periods (see Chapter IX below) and is fundamentally associated with the idea of an animal transformation.¹³¹ Although such a metamorphosis corresponds to a purely psychological process, it was certainly practised by the masked and

122 Müller 1970, pp. 10-18.

123 Müller 1970, pp. 4-10.

124 Müller 1970, pp. 69-73.

125 Müller 1970, pp. 18-23 (e.g. to *Galti*). Cf. also Beck 1965.

126 Müller 1970, p. 67 f.

127 Müller 1970, pp. 35-43 (eagle), pp. 43-52 (hawk, falcon), pp. 52-61 (raven, crow).

128 Müller 1970, pp. 64-67.

129 Müller 1970, p. 178 f.; Höfler 1954.

130 Müller 1970, p. 124 f. and Otto Höfler's formulation (1954, p. 53): "The primary formations are carriers of meaning like the appellatives".

131 In addition to the names that contain the element **grīma*, schw. run. *Biarnhufþi* ("bear skull", cf. Müller 1970, p. 220 f.) should be mentioned as well as an. *Biálfi* (name of the father of Kvel-dúlfr, ancestor of the skald Egill; the appellative *biálfi* denotes a piece of fur clothing, see below chap. VIII on the reindeer skins with which Þórir hundr outfits his warriors), an. *Heðinn* and all the Germanic names from the same family, and finally an. *Loðin* (cf. the an. Adjective *loðin*, "shaggy", or the phrase *loðin sem dýr*, "hairy like a beast" think of Grímr loðinkinni in the *Qrvar-Odds saga* and Loðin in the *Sqrla saga sterka*, who has similar traits to a berserker; cf. also schw. run. *loþin*, as well as Danish and schw. variants, cited in Müller 1970, p. 214; *Loðungr* is one ofnames, cf. Falk 1924,

spectators as "real". As Otto Höfler (1973) has shown in his monograph on mask and transformation cults, in archaic, pre-Christian beliefs there is no clear separation between physical transformation and the change in mental state.¹³² The mask wearer "becomes" truly similar to the animal whose appearance and behavior he takes on. In the course of the wild trance, the animal warrior reveals his "second" nature, which manifests itself in an "animal" form.¹³³ The Old Norse appellative *berserkr* must undoubtedly be interpreted in a similar context.

C From "bear shirt" to "fierce warrior "

1 The thesis of the semantic shift

Originally (certainly before the Viking Age), the term *berserkr* was literally used for warriors dressed a bearskin. It is not unlikely this practice developed in an environment of cultic ceremonies, comparable to those whose legacy persists in some folkloric traditions or in the mythical and heroic narratives of the North⁽¹³⁴⁾.

However, the berserkers are not necessarily characterized by their special clothing, but above all by their frenzy (an. *berserksgangr*):

No. 102). The Frankish forms Wolfhelm / Bernhelm / Eburhelm and as. *Wulfhelm* (cf. Müller 1970, p. 220) undoubtedly allude to the wearing of a helmet whose crest depicts a wolf, a bear or a boar. Other personal names give no direct indication of the use of a pelt or mask, but give the impression of a metamorphosis (cf. an. *Kveldúlfr* and an. *Náttólfr*, "evening wolf/night wolf", or the Germanic names Gan- gulf, Wolfgang, Woldfregil as well as the corresponding forms cited by Müller 1970, p. 213, which connect the process of "running" or "walking" with the wolf). According to Gunter Müller (1970, p. 215 f.), an. *Hemmingr* and the various related Germanic forms (as. *Heming*, alam. *Hemming*, schw. run. *himinkr* etc.) must be connected with an. *hammr* ("form that is assumed during a transformation"). The Germanic Gandulf ("magic wolf", cf. Müller 1970, p. 218) should also be mentioned, as well as the Old Norse names *Greniaðr* ("berserker", cf. stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði: grenjuðu berserkir*) and *Glammaðr* ("barker", name of a berserkr, cf. *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (Rafn (ed.) 1829/1830), p. 387; on an. *glammi* and on the names that come from the same root, cf. Much 1920, pp. 154 f.).

132 The distinction between the "real" and the imaginary, between the phenomenon and its perception, is certainly based on modern categories, inseparable from an "objective" scientific approach.

133 In the context of medieval Christian society, the berserker's ecstatic fit of rage is stripped of any sacred dimension. The ability to transform animals is attributed exclusively to the realm of magic, the miraculous or superstition. In Icelandic sources, the description of a transformation is often linked to a "journey of the soul" - a motif that can also be combined with "werewolf stories".

134 Cf. Narr 1959; Edsman 1982; Edsman 1994; Edsman 1996.

Although no reference is made to the appearance of the animal warriors in the eighth stanza of *Haraldskvæði*, the poet does describe the roars and growls emitted by these fighters, who resemble wild animals (*grenjuðu berserkir*, [. . .] / *emjuðu úlfheðnar*).¹³⁵

The meaning of the urnordic root **ber-* (*ursus*), as attested and preserved in some compounds of the Old Norse poetic language, had obviously not yet been completely forgotten by the Norwegian skalds of the 9th century. However, the poets of Harald Schönhaar's time no longer used the term *berserkr* in the original sense of the word: in *Haraldskvæði*, the appellative *berserkr* does not exclusively refer to warriors clad in a bearskin, but to "furious warriors" in general, among whom *úlfheðnar* (wolf warriors) also appear.

Other terms that also contain an animal designation have undergone a semantically comparable development in the old Germanic languages: The Old Norse *jǫfurr*, whose etymology refers to the "boar", is a poetic, metaphorical designation (*heiti*) of the prince or king;¹³⁶ similarly, the Anglo-Saxon word *beorn* does not denote a bear, but a warrior.

In the case of the generic name *berserkir*, the development from the literal meaning ("bearskin") to the metaphorical meaning ("furious warrior") by no means excludes the image of a warrior dressed in furs. However, this use of the term places more emphasis on the ferocity and fury of the animal warriors than on their equipment. These men are distinguished first and foremost not by their clothing, but by their unique behavior. Incidentally, the

135 Guðbrandur Vigfússon (cf. Guðbrandur Vigfússon / Powell (ed./trans.) 1883, 1, p. 530) sensibly compares this form of "war-whooping" with *barditus*, which is described by Tacitus in his *Germania*. The juxtaposition of the verbs *emja* and *grenja* is an excellent illustration of the behavior of the animal warriors who imitate wild animals. The verbs *emja* and *grenja* are also found in the present participle (*grenjandi* and *emjandi*) in one of the stanzas of the *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892, p. 53); the verb *grenja* also appears in the prose form of the same text (p. 51). The origin of this saga, the oldest manuscript of which dates back to the beginning of the 14th century, undoubtedly goes to the 13th century. The work evidently draws its inspiration from a source in which saga characters also appear in other *Fornaldarsögur* and Eddic poetry, such as Angantyr and his brothers, who form a troop of twelve beast warriors. The motif of the 'roar' emitted by the beast warriors appears in several sources (cf. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, pp. 332 f.). 136 Cf. Beck 1965, p. 183 f. For Beck, who attention to the importance of the boar in the decoration of vendel-time helmets, the origin of this *heiti* is partly explained by the position that the ruler occupies as leader of the retinue at the head of the army - a formation as *caput porci* (an. *svínfylking*, 'pig formation', *rani*, 'boar's trunk', cf. Beck 1965, pp. 41 f.). Beck also argues for a connection between the appellative *jǫfurr* and the importance of the ruler for maintaining the fertility of the kingdom under the patronage of the god Freyr.

Description of berserkers in medieval sources rarely explicitly linked to the wearing of a particular type of animal pelt.

The "mask" of the animal warriors was undoubtedly often reduced to a few purely symbolic elements, *pars pro toto*: Essentially, the theriomorphic masking was not aimed at faithfully imitating the appearance of an animal and thereby deceiving "naive" observers, but at making the presence of a fearsome, numinous power perceptible: The ecstatic frenzy liberates the berserker's animal "double" and connects it to the world of divine powers. Otto Höfler wrote in connection with the *nar* of King Haraldr: "The essential thing here is also that the masking is not wants to "deceive" [. . .], but "symbolizes". [. . .] Being transformed does not mean [. . .] pretence, but a highly real irruption of everyday forces."¹³⁷

The archaeological evidence on the "symbolic" character of these masks provides finds are consistent evidence. Two warrior figures depicted on the matrices of Torslunda wear garments whose "hairy" texture seems to imitate the bear's coat. Nevertheless, these men are not necessarily dressed in real fur from head to toe. By way of comparison, it should be pointed out that the masks in the harbor of Haithabu were made of felt⁽¹³⁸⁾ (see Chapter IX below). These fragments of fabric, certainly intended for playful use, nevertheless provide a good example of an animal "disguise".

The animal warriors did not wear a "uniform" that would have had a standardizing function. The idea of classifying them into different "types of weapons",¹³⁹ each characterized by corresponding fur clothing, is absurd. The wearing of animal skins only aims to create an "overall impression", which is reinforced by the behavior of the angry warrior: According to the various versions of the *Óláfs saga helga*, Þórir hundr's companions dress in either reindeer skins or wolf pelts¹⁴⁰ (see Ch. VIII below). The exact appearance of the animal disguise is ultimately less important than the psychological effect caused by the outburst of indomitable rage. Rather than through the realism of his mask, the warrior reveals his savage nature through his terrifying roar and ecstatic fury.

Incidentally, the wearing of wolf skins appears to be more common than that of bear skins - as evidenced by several iconographic representations and the parallel between the *wolfhetan*/*úlfheðinn* forms. This tradition is truly

¹³⁷ Höfler 1973a, p. 51.

¹³⁸ Hägg 1984a; Hägg 1984b.

¹³⁹ This term is used by Klaus von See 1961b, p. 133, who considers it implausible that bear warriors and wolf warriors would have fought side by side - which, incidentally, is based on an incorrect interpretation of the eighth stanza of *Haraldskvæði* (cf. Müller 1970, p. 222).

¹⁴⁰ Höfler 1940, p. 112, note 52.

This is probably closely linked to the cult of the god Óðinn/Wotan, which was widespread among the Germanic warrior aristocracies, especially since the Migration Period.

According to the converging evidence of archaeological, genealogical and literary sources, the wolf, along with other "wild" animals, had a prominent place in the warlike symbolism of the Germanic peoples.

While the form *úlf-heðinn* does not belong specifically to the Nordic world, the term *ber-serkr* probably comes from a purely Scandinavian tradition, more precisely a Norwegian one: The word does not appear in the *Gesta Danorum*, but is used in skaldic poetry; moreover, it does not appear in the vocabulary of the runic inscriptions.

According to the *Haraldskvæði* tradition, the appellatives *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar* seem to have referred to members of the same group of warriors in the retinue of King Haraldr hárfagri. However, the two sub-stantives, which originated in ancient times, had very different fates in medieval literature.

The term *úlfheðinn*, which is always used in the literal sense, explicitly recalls the wearing of wolf pelts. This word was undoubtedly used in various parts of the Germanic world as an anthroponym as well as a designation of warrior groups. The rapid disappearance of this tradition Christianization explains the rarity with which this term appears in the Old Norse sources.

The word *berserkr*, on the other hand, seems to have originally been used in a geographically limited area, probably the western edge of the Scandinavian peninsula. Having lost its literal meaning ("bear's shirt") relatively early on, the term acquired a broader meaning in the Viking Age: that of a warrior adopting the demeanor of a predator - powerful, fierce, fearsome. For these warriors, the type of coat they wore was unimportant; what was essential was their ability to display the impetuosity and bloodthirsty ferocity of an animal during battle.

In contrast to the appellative *úlfheðinn*, the Old Norse *berserkr* was medieval Icelandic literature, which adopted and partly rescued the heritage of Old West Norse, pre-Christian poetry and culture. In the context of this tradition, the *úlfheðnar* appear to some extent like a special kind of *berserkir*,¹⁴¹ the latter term referring generically to animal warriors.

This scheme does not seem to contradict the etymological interpretation proposed by Sveinbjörn Egilsson.

141 This definition of the term *úlfheðinn* is also provided by Fritzner 1886-1896, 3, p. 764: "et Slags Ber- serkr, der kaldtes saaledes af den Pels, de vare iførte".

In comparison, the etymology based on the root *berr-* (*nudus*) - to which Noreen and Kuhn refer - encounters a crucial obstacle: even if it is philologically acceptable, it bypasses the parallel between the forms *ber-serkr* and *úlf-heðinn* and ignores the archaeological evidence that clearly confirms the reality of wearing animal masks in a cultic or martial context.

The objections directed against the etymology **ber-* (*ursus*) seem weaker. The thesis of an early semantic development of the term *berserkr*, which originated in Norway during the transition from Proto-Norse to Old Norse, also makes it possible to explain certain unclear points (absence of this appellative in continental Germanic vocabulary; hardly any consistent use of the term in medieval Old Norse literature, etc.). Contrary to the conclusions drawn by Klaus von See,¹⁴² the phrase *úlfheðnar heita þeir* ('they are called *úlfheðnar*'), which is used for the Ber-serks in *Haraldskvæði*, need not lead us to deny the authenticity of the poem: In King Haraldr hárfagri's retinue, the berserkers and the 'wolfskins' do not form two different troops, characterized by different "uniforms" (bearskins on one side, wolf pelts on the other), but one and the same group of animal warriors.

2 Conclusion of the etymological study

At the end of this etymological study, it is advisable to take stock before examining the sources in more detail.

In the Germanic languages as a whole, the Old Norse compounds *úlf-heðinn* and *ber-serkr* are the only two generic names that explicitly designate animal warriors. The archaeological material attests to the existence of masked warriors in very widely separated areas - from Scandinavia to the Alamannic culture area - over a relatively long period of time (in the north from the Vendel period to the Viking Age, on the continent until the 7th century).

Outside the Scandinavian area, no source provides information about the Germanic terms associated with this warlike custom: The constructions of the type wolf-hetan or wolf-hroc have only survived as personal names. In the absence of a common Germanic terminology, which incidentally is also lacking for the institution of allegiance,¹⁴³ one must assume that

¹⁴² Cf. von See 1961a, p. 102.

¹⁴³ The lack of a common terminology has led Hans Kuhn (1956) to doubt the existence of Gefolgschaft for a large part of the Germanic world. His philological

The existence of different designations, which were assigned to the respective warrior groups at the discretion of local traditions.

Under such circumstances, it is difficult to reconstruct the origin of this phenomenon. It certainly did not arise *ex nihilo*: Its most archaic features can be found in related forms throughout the Indo-European world.¹⁴⁴

In accordance with a general development that can be proven for the warrior organizations organized by succession, the tradition of the "animal warriors" nevertheless seems to have experienced a particular upswing during the Migration Period¹⁴⁵ - even if this process can be attributed an uneven significance and duration in different areas of the Germanic cultural area.

The animal warriors¹⁴⁶ closely associated with the pagan cults undoubtedly disappeared as soon as the *comitatus* had departed from its archaic form. Under the influence of the Christianized elite, the institution of the *comitatus* developed in a direction that was better suited to strengthening royal power.

This development very early on the continent. Among the Scandinavians, on the other hand, the tradition of animal warriors lasted longer - at least until the 10th century, as the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* attest.¹⁴⁷ The thesis of later relics of pagan customs in "peripheral" regions that resisted Christian influence for longer cannot be dismissed: The reports describing the engagement of the Norwegian chieftain Þórir hundr on the battlefield of Stiklastaðir around 1030 probably go in this direction.¹⁴⁸

It should be noted that the term *berserkr* has undergone considerable semantic development, depending on the source. More than three centuries

However, arguments usually represent a hypercritical approach, as John Lindow (1976) has shown.

144 Cf. especially Wikander 1938; Widengren 1969; Dumézil 1985; MacCone 1987; Kershaw 2000; Speidel 2002; Birkhan 2006.

145 The use of masks and animal skins naturally belongs to a continuity of much older practices (see Chapter IX below). However, only the late antique and medieval sources make it possible to establish a connection between the phenomenon of animal warriors, the customs of warrior groups organized by allegiance and the cult of Óðinn/Wotan. At this point, will not take part in the discussion about the origin of Odinic mythology, which is sometimes regarded as a proto-Germanic heritage rooted in the distant Indo-European past, sometimes as the result of various "later" influences (for a summary of the various theories, see Hultgård 2007).

146 Cf. chapter VI of the *Ynglinga saga*.

147 Cf. stanzas 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði*.

148 Cf. e.g. Höfler 1940. The sources dealing with Þórir hundr will be examined in more detail in the course of this study (see chapter VIII below).

After the creation of *Haraldskvæði*, the appellative *berserkr* has a special fate in Icelandic literature; the *sagnamenn* introduce many different characters under this name⁽¹⁴⁹⁾.

In this context, the word *berserkr* has definitely moved away from its etymological meaning: often the berserkers described the authors of the 13th century have little in common with the beast warriors of the beginning of the Viking Age. These, who disappeared at the same time as the beliefs and with which they were probably associated, have not been part of the way of life in medieval Scandinavian society for a long time.

Incidentally, the animal warriors never managed to maintain their traditions in Iceland, as François-Xavier Dillmann emphasizes: "L'Islande ancienne, qui ne connut jamais de royauté autochtone . . . , ne semble pas avoir accordé une place importante au culte d'Óðinn . . . , à la vénération d'un dieu qui était avant tout celui des rois et des jarlar. Les conditions politiques et religieuses qui avaient favorisé la formation ou, à tout le moins, le développement des groupes de berserks en Scandinavie paraissent donc avoir été absentes sur le sol islandais."¹⁵⁰

In many Old Norse sagas, the berserker appears as a purely fictional character whose description essentially follows literary conventions. In many cases, the resulting image proves to be very dissimilar to the historical figure of the beast warrior. However, the tradition of the berserker can be reconstructed on the basis of a detailed examination of the primary sources and the skaldic texts, which is undertaken in the following chapter.

149 chapter VII.

150 Cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 263. On the minor influence of the Óðinn cult on Iceland, cf. .g. Turville-Petre 1972; on the connection between the Odin beliefs and the function of the ruler, cf. Dumézil 1977, pp. 189-195 and de Vries 1970, 2, pp. 48 f.

Chapter III

The berserkers in the Skaldic and Eddic sources: *Haraldskvæði* and other poems

Skaldic art, which precedes the formation of the earliest Old Norse prose, attests to the use of the appellatives *úlfheðinn* and *berserkr* from the Viking Age onwards. The oldest evidence for the use of both terms comes from the *Haraldskvæði*. Animal warriors are mentioned twice in this long song of praise to King Harald Schönhaar (*Haraldr hárfagri*): the eighth stanza of the poem describes the participation of berserkers in the sea battle in Hafrsfjord, which Harald won around 872; stanzas 20 and 21 describe the role of these warriors in the royal retinue. The information provided is scarce, but can be placed in a precise historical context: that of the southwestern Norwegian petty kingdoms in the last decades of the 9th century. Medieval tradition attributes the fragments that make up the *Haraldskvæði* to famous followers of King Haraldr, who were among his favored skalds. At first glance, this work appears to be a contemporary record of the deeds described. Among the countless Old Norse texts in which berserkers are mentioned, this poem must definitely be regarded as a primary source: In the corpus of Icelandic sagas, several descriptions of the Battle of Hafrsfjord are inspired by these skaldic stanzas.¹

Nevertheless, several uncertainties remain regarding the origin and dating of some parts of the text. Philologists have expressed different opinions on this question.

This question, which has been debated from the 19th century to the present day, is of considerable importance for the present study: the degree of authenticity attributed to one or another stanza of *Haraldskvæði* has a direct influence on the interpretation of the phenomenon of animal warriors⁽²⁾.

This is particularly the case with Klaus von See. He questions the traditional dating of the poem and attempts to refute its documentary value.³ According to von See, the use of the appellation *berserkr* only entered common usage long after the Viking Age, thanks to an "archaizing" fashion promoted by the 12th-century Skalds.⁴ This thesis radically contradicts the commonly held opinion: the

1 chapter IV.

2 This remark applies above all to stanzas 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði*.

3 Cf. von See 1961a.

4 Cf. von See 1961b.

On the contrary, most scholars rely on the *Haraldskvæði* to prove the existence of a type of warrior in ancient Scandinavia known by the word *berserker*⁽⁵⁾.

The dating of the poem and the associated assessment of the historical reliability of this source naturally a decisive criterion for the interpretation of the tradition of the beast warriors. This chapter will therefore focus primarily on the investigation of the tradition of *Haraldskvæði* and the various theories associated with it.

A The creation of *Haraldskvæði*: stages of a reconstruction

The structure of this work, as it reproduced in modern editions of the skaldic corpus,⁶ is the result of a complex, late process of composition.

The title *Haraldskvæði* was written by Theodor Wisén and was first published in 1886 in the collection *Carmina Norræna*⁽⁷⁾.

This name, which does not appear in the medieval sources, refers to the texts established in 1847 by the Norwegian philologists Carl R. Unger and Peter A. Munch⁸ (*Oldnorsk Laesebog*). The version proposed at this time comprises no fewer than 24 stanzas. The poem never appears in this form in the Old Norse sources: The manuscripts that have come down to us provide only independent fragments of poems of unequal length embedded in prose narratives.

Three of these sources - the Norwegian chronicle known as *Fagrskinna* and the two main works of the Iclander Snorri Sturluson, the *Heimskringla* and the *Edda* - were written in the first half of the 13th century.

The fourth source is an Icelandic compilation from the end of the 14th century, the *Flateyjarbók*.

The quotations from *Haraldskvæði* contained these works are rarely attributed to the same skald and have no title. According to the written tradition, therefore, there is no clear evidence that all the stanzas come from one and the same poem.

The two longest fragments appear in the *Fagrskinna*. The first of these fragments takes the form of a dialog between a Valkyrie (an. *valkyrja*) and a

5 Cf. Höfler 1976.

6 *Skj.* A:1, pp. 24-29, B:1, pp. 22-25; Kock (ed.) 1946-1949; Fulk (ed./trans.) 2012.

7 Wisén (ed.) 1886-1889, 1, pp. 11-14.

8 Munch / Unger (ed.) 1847, pp. 111-114 and p. VII, note 19.

raven (an. *hrafn*). The black bird, which is used to following Haraldr on the battlefield, praises the ruler's fighting spirit and commends the king for the generosity with which he makes his followers happy.

This unit comprises 15 stanzas, two of which mention animal warriors. These are stanzas 12 and 13 of this fragment,⁹ which correspond to stanzas 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði* in modern anthologies of skaldic poetry.

The second fragment quoted in the *Fagrskinna* consists of five stanzas commemorating Haraldr's victory in the Hafrsfjord¹⁰ over the petty kings in southern Norway.¹¹ One of the five stanzas describes the intervention of the *berser-kir* and the *úlfheðnar* in the battle. It is the second stanza of the fragment,¹² which corresponds to the eighth stanza of *Haraldskvæði*.

In order to facilitate the discussion of this question, *Fagrskinna*'s two poem fragments will be the following titles in this study: "Raven fragment" and "Hafrsfjord fragment".

According to the author of the *Fagrskinna*, these are obviously different texts: The authorship of the former is attributed to the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi¹³, that of the latter to the skald Þjóðólfr ór

9 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 11 f.

10 To. *Hafrsfjorðr*. This approx. 9 km long fjord lies west of the city of Stavanger. For this place name, see Andersson 1999.

11 A certain amount of uncertainty surrounds the date of this battle. In the 19th century, Rudolf Keyser suggested the year 872 by comparing the chronological reference points provided by the medieval sources. Keyser's calculations were challenged by Halvdan Koht, who dated the event around 900. According to the Icelandic Ólafía Einarsdóttir, the battle was fought between 870 and 875. Some historians argue for an even later date (885 or 890). Another debate concerns the geographical origin of the various opponents: in this regard, some authors have raised objections to the traditional account of the events, which is mostly based on the narrative contained in the *Heimskringla* (cf. e.g. von See 1961a, p. 105 f.; Masdalen 2005). As these questions no bearing on the present study, they will not be discussed further in this study. On the history of the battle and King Harald's reign, see, among others, Koht 1931 and 1955; Schreiner 1933 and 1936; Andersen 1941; Campbell 1942; de Vries 1942; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1968; Sawyer 1976; Andersen 1977; Gunnes 1986; Holmsen 1991; Karras 1993; Krause 1999.

12 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 16.

13 To. *Þórbjörn hornklofi* or *hornklofi skald*, cf. Fidjestøl 1993. Þórbjörn hornklofi is also regarded as the author of the poem *Glymdrápa* as well as a *lausavísa*. He is a relative of King Haraldr, as the text of the *Fagrskinna*, which is quoted in this work, attests. The medieval sources, on the other hand, do not comment on the origin of the Beina- mens attributed to Þórbjörn. The unique feature that the fifteen stanzas quoted in the *Fagrskinna* describe the dialog between a Valkyrie and a raven best explains the origin of the epithet *hornklofi* (literally: "horn cleft"). The term appears in the *Pulur* of the *Snorra Edda* (IV, tt, 1), where it follows a poetic paraphrase

Hvíni.¹⁴ This information is partly contradicted by Icelandic sources, in which some stanzas also occur (*Heimskringla*, *Flateyjarbók*).

In the *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson quotes the sixth stanza of the "Raven Fragment" as well as the five stanzas of the "Hafrsfjord Fragment".¹⁵ Interestingly, the historian of the kings of Norway refers to Þórbjörn hornklofi as the author of both texts. This view seems paradoxical: even in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* (chap. II) there is a short quotation from the "Hafrsfjord fragment"¹⁶, which is attributed to Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni.

The compilers of the *Flateyjarbók* also connect the "Hafrsfjord fragment" with the name Þjóðólfr and attribute one of the stanzas of the "Raven fragment"¹⁷ to the skald Auðun illskælda⁽¹⁸⁾.

(*heiti*) of a raven (*Skj.* A:1, p. 686, B:1, p. 676). The figure of the poet appears in the *Skálda saga*, which, however, not a historically reliable tradition.

14 To *Þjóðólfr skald ór Hvíni* or *Þjóðólfr hinn hvinnverski*, cf. Clunies Ross 1993., who comes from the south of Norway (area around Kvinesdal, cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 360, note 3), is introduced by Snorri Sturluson as a "close friend of the king" (*Þjóðólfr var ástvinr konungs [Harald's saga hárfagra*, p. 135]). The *Skáldatal* actually connects the skald with King Haraldr (Jón Sigurðsson / Finnur Jónsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (ed./trans.) 1880-1887, pp. 253, 261 and 273). Þjóðólfr is also considered the author of the *Haustlång* and the *Ynglingatal* - genealogical poems listing the ancestors of Rognvaldr the Glorious (*Rogn- valdr heiðum-hæri*), king of Vestfold and presumed cousin of King Haraldr. According to the poem, Rognvaldr's family comes from the old Swedish royal family of Ynglingar. Snorri Sturluson relies on this source for his *Ynglinga saga*.

15 These stanzas appear in the *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ("Saga of Harald Haarschön"). The various manuscripts of the *Heimskringla* do indeed attribute the sixth stanza of the 'Raven Fragment' to Þórbjörn hornklofi, with the exception of *Codex Frisianus* (*AM 45 fol*), which mentions the name Þjóðólfr. Manuscript *J1* (*AM 37 fol*, copy of the *Jöfraskinna*, dated to the second half of the 16th century) contains only the initial "Þ" (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 120).

16 The four verses quoted in this excerpt (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* [Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931], p. 9) come from the last stanza of the "Hafrsfjord fragment" (which corresponds to stanza 11 of *Haraldskvæði*).

17 These are the stanzas that mention animal warriors and stanza 21 of *Haraldskvæði* correspond.

18 Guðbrandr Vigfússon / Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 568. Auðun is a Norwegian poet of the 9th century. According to the *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1924, chap. VIII, p. 26), this skald first served King Halfdan the Black and then his son Haraldr hárfagri. At his court, he was given a place on a high seat (*þndvegi*). The adventures of this skald are also recounted in a saga of dubious historicity, which has been handed down in the *Hauksbók: Skálda saga Haralds konungs hárfagra*. Aude writes a *drápa* (skaldic poem belonging to the panegyric) in honor of King Harald, the refrain of which borrows from one of his relatives, the skald Úlfr Sebbasson. He probably owes his nickname "bad skald" (*illskælda*) to this approach, as the author of a *drápa* with a "stolen refrain" (*stolinsteffa*). However, only two fragments by him have survived (*Skj.* A:1, p. 6, B:1, p. 6): a *Lausavisa*, which is quoted in the *Skálda saga*, and another in the 3rd Gram-

These discrepancies seem to confirm the relative independence of the Icelandic sources with regard to the *Fagrskinna*. Did the author of the *Heim- skringla* know the text of the Norwegian chronicle, as is usually assumed today¹⁹? Is Snorri Sturluson making a mistake when he uses the stanzas of the "Hafsfjordfragments" to Þórbjörn hornklofi, or is he deliberately contradicting the *Fagrs- kinna*? What information is he relying on? These questions cannot be answered conclusively. As the skald Aude, he is not mentioned in either the *Fagrskinna* or the *Heimskringla*, which were written more than a century and a half before the *Flateyjarbók*.

The contradictory nature of the medieval texts is not surprising: the manuscript tradition, which was subject to many changes, rarely proves to be infallible. Gaps, corruptions or interpolations are not uncommon. The origin and dating of some verses, as well as the identity of the poets to whom they are attributed, often give rise to lively debates.

What credibility do the accounts of the Icelandic *sagnamenn* have?²⁰ The medieval authors like to rely on the *auctoritas majorum*; they are hardly prepared to refute the teaching of tradition or to question the age of the stanzas.

These general observations apply in particular to the fragments that make up the *Haraldskvæði*: If they were composed by a contemporary of Haraldr, a phase of oral transmission must be assumed, extending from the end of the 9th century to the first manuscript versions. When were the oldest manuscripts written? This cannot be determined with certainty. However, no trace of a redaction before the 13th century has survived.

However, the existence of a more or less long phase of oral tradition without considerable distortion of the surviving poem fragments is by no means implausible. Despite the contradictions regarding the authorship of the respective stanzas, the readings of the various manuscripts differ only slightly from one another. This proximity to the original form of the stanzas, as they must have looked at the time of their composition, should not come as a surprise. The strict rules of skaldic prosody rarely allow changes to the vocabulary and syntax of a poem without completely altering the form at the same time. This phenomenon can easily explain the essentially faithful transmission of the text.

matic treatise of the *Codex Wormianus* (AM 242 fol) - a treatise written around 1250 by Þórðarson, a nephew of Snorri Sturluson.

19 Cf. e.g. Dillmann 2000a, p. 22 f.

20 In Iceland, a *sagnamaðr* a man who writes or conveys a report (*saga*).

The "Raven Fragment" and the "Hafrsfjord Fragment", which are quoted independently of each other in the Old Norse sources, also have many stylistic similarities: Written in the Eddic style, they both use the same prosodic forms. Each stanza is written in *málahátt*²¹, with insertions in *ljóðahátt*²² in the last stanzas of the "Raven Fragment".²³ There are further indications of a relationship: both poems are to the exploits of King Harald; they belong to the same poetic genre that was particularly popular in the ancient Germanic world - the praise songs.²⁴ In addition, the "Hafrsfjord fragment" opens with an interrogative form in the second person singular: *Heyrðir þú í Hafrsfirði, / hvé hizug barðisk / konungr enn kynstóri [. . .]*.²⁵ This turn is reminiscent of the dialog structure of the "Raven Fragment": it seems to fit into the framework of the speech that the raven to the Valkyrie. This stylistic and thematic relationship has many philologists to unite the two pieces, which were handed down independently of each other until the 19th century.

Unger and Munch were the first to postulate the existence of a single work. However, the structure of the reconstructed poem differs significantly from the manuscript tradition.

This version changes the arrangement of the fragments as in the manuscripts. In the edition published in 1847, the "Hafrsfjord fragment" corresponds to stanzas 7 to 11, which were inserted into the "Raven fragment".

21 *Málahátt* (an. *mál*, "solemn, pompous speech", "utterance", here in the sense of "song (about old times)", and *hátt*, "meter"). The *málahátt*, which is introduced in stanza 95 of *Háttatal* by Snorri Sturluson (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 251), is generally regarded as a variant of the Eddic verse meter *fornyrðislag* ("old-age tone"). The long line of the *málahátt* differs mainly from the *fornyrðislag* by the higher number of syllables (at least 5 instead of 4) in each half-line. On the *Málahátt* see Marold 2001b. For further bibliographical references dealing with Old Norse prosody, see Gade / Fulk 2000.

22 "Metrum strophicum" (based according to Möbius and von See on the meaning *ljóð*, "stanza") or "tone of the magic songs" (based according to Noreen, Heusler and Lie on the meaning *ljóð*, "musical manner, melody"). On this Eddic meter, which is introduced in stanza 100 in Snorri's *Háttatal* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 252), see Marold 2001a, pp. 535-540. In principle, the *ljóðahátt* always alternates between a "long verse" modeled on the *fornyrðislag* and a shorter verse without a caesura.

23 Cf. Wisén 1886 and Wisén (ed.) 1886-1889, 1, pp. 184-187 (Conspectus Metrorum). According to Wisén stanzas 1 to 17 of *Haraldskvæði* were written in *málahátt* and stanzas 18 to 24 of the poem (which correspond to stanzas 10 to 15 of the "Raven Fragment") represent the following interplay: *málahátt* in stanzas 18^{(1) (-) (2)}, 19^{(4) (-) (11)}, 20^{(1) (-) (2)}, 21^{(7) (-) (10)} and 22^{(1) (-) (2)}; *ljóðahátt* in stanzas 18^{(3) (-) (5)}, 19^{(1) (-) (3)}, 20^{(3) (-) (5)}, 21^{(1) (-) (6)}, 22^{(3) (-) (5)}; *málahátt* in stanza 23; *ljóðahátt* in stanza

24 The last two stanzas are actually half-stanzas, which were combined into one stanza in later editions of the poem, the structure of which is identical to stanza 21.

24 In the Old Norse world, this genre is primarily associated with the *Haraldskvæði*, the *Hákonar- mál* and the *Eiríksmál* (cf. e.g. Genzmer 1920; Marold 2003).

25 For a complete translation of the verse, see below.

The latter, which is now divided into two parts, provides the material for stanzas 1 to 6 and 15 to 24⁽²⁶⁾.

Three stanzas in the *málaháttir*, which do not belong to the fragments mentioned above, complete the work; they are stanzas 12 to 14. Stanza 12 - actually a half-stanza - comes from Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*.²⁷ Snorri these verses Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni. They recall the remains of the dead consecrated to Óðinn lying on the sand. These four verses complement the description of the Battle of Hafrsfjord in a poignant way. The meaning and syntax of the last verse (*fögnuðum dád slíkri*, 'we welcome such a deed') seem to refer to the raven's speech in the 'Raven Fragment'. Verses 13 and 14 celebrate the marriage of King Haraldr to the Danish princess Ragn- hildr. They come from the *Flateyjarbók*⁽²⁸⁾ which attributes them to Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni. Verse 14 also appears in the *Heimskringla*²⁹ and in some manuscripts of the "great saga" by Óláfr Tryggvason.³⁰

In the poem edited by Unger and Munch, the animal warriors consequently appear twice: first in stanza 8, which comes from the "Hafrsfjord Fragment", and finally stanzas 20 and 21, which come from the "Raven Fragment".

The two editors give the text a clear title: "Brudstykker af et gammelt Kvad om Harald Haarfagres Hof, forfattet af hans Hirdskalde".⁽³¹⁾ In fact, Unger and Munch assume that the work is a joint poem that stems from the combined talent of the skalds Þorbjörn, Þjóðólfr and Auðun. Further attributions were proposed in the course of the 19th century. Some of them concern the entire work, but sometimes only one of the main groups of stanzas that make the work. These different suggestions correspond to the two possible editing methods. The complete version, which was reconstructed according to Unger and Munch's thesis, is opposed by the independent presentation of each of these fragments, which corresponds to the manuscript tradition.

As early as 1860, Theodor Möbius took the former position and christened the poem *Haraldsmál*.³² He was followed shortly afterwards by Hjalmar Kempff, who devoted his in Uppsala to this *Haralds-mál*.⁽³³⁾ Two decades later, Theodor Wisén gave the work the name *Haraldskvæði*, which proved to be the name for the poem

26 In the edition by Unger and Munch, the last two half-stanzas of the fragment are presented as two different stanzas with the numbers 23 and 24.

27 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 89.

28 *Harald's þáttir hárfagra*, p. 576.

29 *Haralds saga hárfagra*, p. 127.

30 Cf. *skj.* A:1, p. 27, where the readings from the manuscripts *AM 53*, *AM 55*, *AM 61* and the *Bergsbók* are listed.

31 "Fragments of an old song about Harald Schönhaar's farm, written by his Hofskalden".

32 Möbius (ed.) 1860, commentary p. VII and VIII, text p. 228 f.

33 Kempff 1866.

should prevail. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Frederic Y. Powell also edited the entire text, which they called *Hornklofi's Raven-Song*.³⁴

The most important anthologies of skaldic poetry, edited by Finnur Jónsson (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 1908-1915) and subsequently by Ernst A. Kock (*Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1946-1949), attribute the entire work to Þorbjörn³⁵ and resume the title proposed by Wisén.³⁶ These editions reduce the poem to 23 stanzas by combining the last two half-stanzas of the 1847 version. In the new edition of skaldic poetry (SPSMA), the entire poem is still published as a whole with the title *Haraldskvæði*,³⁷ even though Robert D. Fulk points out in his commentary that there is insufficient proof that all 23 stanzas belong together: "The evidence for the unity of all twenty-three stanzas is . . . inconclusive."³⁸

In his history of Old Norse literature, Finnur Jónsson presents his arguments for a formal unity of the *Haraldskvæði*.³⁹ The Icelandic philologist considers the existence of two different works redundantly to the same ruler, to be unlikely. According to the author, one should also not be surprised at the contradictory nature of the sources: The abbreviations used by the copyists could cause confusion about the origin of the stanzas. In medieval manuscripts, a name is often abbreviated with the initial letter. According to this procedure, the "Þ" can stand for both Þorbjörn and its contemporary Þjóðólfr.⁴⁰

Finnur Jónsson is joined by several scholars who are convinced that the various fragments belong to the same work: These are above all Konstantin Reichardt,⁴¹ Ludwig Wolff,⁴² Ivar Lindquist⁴³ and Felix Genzmer. The latter provided a beautiful version of the song in his German translation of the Eddic songs, which was published under the title *Haraldlied*.⁴⁴ The one-

34 Guðbrandur Vigfússon / Powell (ed./trans.) 1883, 1, pp. 254-259 and 529-532. The title "Hornklofi's Raven-Song" clearly identifies the skald Þorbjörn hornklofi as the author of the poem.

35 Finnur Jónsson points out, however, that some medieval sources attribute several stanzas to Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni (*Skj. A:1*, p. 24).

36 Finnur Jónsson combines this title with the term *Hrafnsmál*, which Jón Sigurðsson uses exclusively for the "Raven Fragment" (see below).

37 Fulk (ed./trans.) 2012.

38 Fulk (ed./trans.) 2012, p. 92.

39 Finnur Jónsson 1920, p. 427 f. In this work, Finnur Jónsson clearly seems to prefer the title *Hrafnsmál*.

40 Cf. especially *AM 37 fol*, p. 33r11.

41 Reichardt 1926, pp. 323-326.

42 Wolff 1952, p. 100.

43 Lindquist (ed.) 1929, pp. 2-8.

44 Genzmer (transl.) 1932, p. 192 f.; cf. also Genzmer 1926, p. 126 f.

Andreas Heusler's commentary, which was no doubt inspired by the second half of the poem, presents it as "a precious portrait of manners".

For Magnus Olsen⁴⁵ and Just Bing⁴⁶, the poem, which was composed on occasion of King Haraldr's marriage to the Danish princess Ragnhildr, is a single piece. Indeed, stanzas 13 and 14 of *Haraldskvæði* allude to this event⁽⁴⁷⁾.

In his *Old Norse Literary History*, Jan de Vries is much more circumspect⁽⁴⁸⁾. He particularly emphasizes stylistic differences between the two fragments and suggests a two-stage genesis: Þórbjörn hornklofi had written the first version of the poem shortly after the victory of Hafrsfjord and added to his work several years later on the occasion of the royal wedding. Some scholars, skeptical of the model proposed by Unger and Munch, prefer to separate the main fragments of *Haraldskvæði* by removing the stanzas dealing with the high time.

This solution is adopted above all by Marius Nygaard,⁴⁹ Friedrich Sueti⁵⁰ and Nora Kershaw⁵¹. Jón Sigurðsson⁵² adopts the same method in his edition of the *Snorra-Edda* and gives each of the fragments its own title: "Kvæði um Hafrsfjarðar orustu (Carmen de pugna Hafursfjordensi)",⁵³ which follows the "Hafrsfjord fragment", and "Hrafnsmál or Kvæði um hirðsiðu (Carmen de moribus aulicis apud Haraldum regem pulchre comatum)",⁵⁴ which corresponds to the "Raven fragment".

In the journal *Tímarit máls og menningar*⁵⁵, Jón Helgason also argues in favor of a representation based on the independent fragments as handed down in the manuscripts. In the anthology *Skjaldevers*⁵⁶, however, he edits the *Haraldskvæði* according to the model proposed by Unger and Munch.

The choice between the two approaches is often linked to the debate about the authenticity of some of the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* and is therefore relevant to our

45 Olsen 1942, pp. 1-70 (especially pp. 26 f.).

46 Bing 1943.

47 The affiliation of these two stanzas to the *Haraldskvæði*, which allow this interpretation, is unfortunately disputed.

48 de Vries 1999, p. 136 f.

49 Nygaard 1875, p. 316 f.

50 Sueti 1884.

51 Kershaw (ed.) 1922, pp. 76-91.

52 Jón Sigurðsson / Finnur Jónsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (ed./trans.) 1880-1887, 3, p. 409 f.

53 Jón Sigurðsson / Finnur Jónsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (eds./trans.) 1880-1887, 3, p. 409.

54 Jón Sigurðsson / Finnur Jónsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (eds./trans.) 1880-1887, 3, p. 410.

55 Jón Helgason 1946.

56 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1961, pp. 10-21.

topic of great importance. The examination of the connections between the "Hafrsfjord fragment" and the "Raven fragment", which are considered either as different works or as parts of a whole, has an extremely influence on the interpretation of certain passages. This remark refers precisely to stanzas 8, 20 and 21, which are closely linked to the spread of the topos of the berserker in Old Norse literature. Depending on the evaluation of the original structure of the respective poem fragments, their historical value can vary greatly.

Two studies published by Klaus von See in 1961 clearly demonstrate the importance of this question. In "Studien zum Haraldskvæði", the author adopts a hypercritical position and attempts to refute the traditional dating of the poem: he attributes the first twelve stanzas to the skald Þórbjörn and regards the rest of the work as an apocryphal composition dating to the 11th or 12th century. In a second article entitled "Berserkr. Excursus on the Haraldskvæði", the German philologist his thoughts on the subject of the beast warriors. In doing so, he attaches only minor importance to the tradition of the *Haraldskvæði*. Klaus von See regards the compound *ber-serkr* as a *hapax* in the repertoire of the 9th century skalds; he sees this term as an originally purely poetic term introduced jörn hornklofi in the eighth stanza of the poem. Klaus von See regards the expression *berserkja reiðu*, which occurs in the second half of *Haraldskvæði*, as a simple paraphrase that was formed long after Þórbjörn hornklofi by a clumsy imitator. According to this theory, the word *berserkr*, which unknown in the Viking Age, could not have acquired its function as a generic name in the Icelandic language before the 12th century; this late development is explained by purely literary reminiscences. We will back to this thesis, the validity of which has already been questioned in the course of the previous chapter.

From the 13th century onwards, the fragments that make up the *Haraldskvæði* became a literary as well as a historiographical tradition: The stanzas in which the animal warriors are mentioned have inspired several descriptions of the Battle of Hafrsfjord.

Three main works have already been mentioned in which parts of the poem have been integrated into the prose part: the *Fagrskinna*, the *Heimskringla* and the *Flateyjarbók*. Three Icelandic sagas, in which no verses of *Haraldskvæði* appear, nevertheless contain very similar depictions of historical events: *Egils saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*.⁵⁷ All of these narratives obviously draw

⁵⁷ *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 22 f.; *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 5; *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 24 f.

from the same source: the use of certain formulas⁵⁸ and the mention of some common details⁵⁹ reveal the extent of borrowing in each of these texts.

These works were written down more than three centuries after the presumed origin of *Haraldskvæði*. A number of changes could have occurred during this period: Interpolations, omissions, confusion between various skalds and various poems.

It is therefore advisable to examine each of the two fragments carefully, as they are handed down to us by the medieval tradition, before the *Haraldskvæði* tradition can be considered reliable evidence.

B The fragments of *Haraldskvæði*: an investigation of the Old Norse written tradition

1 The text of the *Fagrskinna*

The "Raven Fragment", attributed to Þórbjörn hornklofi

This fragment is the first poetic text to be quoted in the *Fagrskinna*. Its 15 stanzas recall the deeds of King Haraldr hárfagrís and Haraldr's court, his warriors, skalds and jugglers. The readings provided by the two versions of the Norwegian Chronicle (*A* and *B*)⁶⁰ differ only slightly for the most part.

58 Cf. especially stanza 21 of *Haraldskvæði* (vv. 1-2): *Úlfheðnar heita þeir* and the following words of the *Vatnsdæla saga*, chap. IX: *þeir berserkir, er Úlfheðnar váru kallaðir*. In the *Grettis saga* (ch. II), the same wording is used for *berserkir*: *þeir váru kallaðir úlfheðnar*.

59 According to the three sagas, the beast warriors take their place on the king's side during the Battle of Hafrsfjord, in accordance with the role attributed to them by the author of *Haraldskvæði*.

60 The letters *A* and *B* traditionally designate the two Norwegian parchments containing the text of the chronicle - one dates to the first half of the 14th century (*A*), the other to the middle of the 13th century (*B*). After they were transferred to Copenhagen, both manuscripts disappeared in the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728, except for one page from *B*, which remained in Norway and is kept in Oslo under the shelfmark *NRA 51*. Several paper copies, made in the 17th century, transmit the text of the manuscripts. For *A* we have three copies in the hand of Ásgeir Jónsson (1657-1707): *AM 301 4to*, *AM 303 4to* and *AM 52 fol* (copied after *AM 303 4to*). A fourth manuscript, *OsloUB 545 4to*, was copied by an unknown hand after the text of *AM 301 4to*. We know of a copy of parchment *B* by Ásgeir Jónsson, *OsloUB 371 fol*, and two copies by Eyjólfur Björnsson (1666-1746), *AM 51 fol* and *AM 302 4to*. Versions *A* and *B* both contain lacunae, especially the copies of *B*. However, the latter seem to be more similar to the archetype. According to the most frequently expressed opinion, the work was written in Norway in the vicinity of Trondheim during the first half of the 13th century. The author, whose name and origin are unknown

The manuscripts give no indication of the title of the poem. According to Jón Sigurðsson, the work was known as *Hrafnsmál*⁶¹ – which no source confirms. The thesis is based on the role given from the first verse to the strange bird to which the skald lends his voice. The nickname given to the alleged author of the 15 stanzas Þórbjörn *hornklofi* ("horn cleft"), presumably has its origins in the structure of this work. Jón Sigurðsson, for his part, gives this fragment the title "Kvæði um hirðsiðu". This formulation follows on perfectly from the last nine stanzas, in which the skald lists the most important members of the royal entourage. The word *hirð*, however, which is attested in Old Norse sources from the 11th century onwards and denotes a – mostly royal – retinue,⁶² does not appear in the poem. It is known, mainly thanks to the tradition of Tacitus,⁶³ that the origins of this institution are ancient and firmly anchored in the Germanic world.⁶⁴ As there is no reliable information on the title of the poem, the 15 stanzas will continue to be to as the "raven fragment".

The structure of this text, as it inserted in the *Fagrskinna*, will now be examined. The author of the chronicle, who praises King Harald's generosity towards his followers, first quotes a group of six strophes attributed to the skald Þórbjörn (who is clearly named by his epithet *hornklofi*). He is described as an "old friend of the king, who has been a follower since his childhood"⁶⁵.

has a profound knowledge of Icelandic sources. In the Middle Ages, the chronicle was undoubtedly as *Nóregs konunga tal* (according to manuscript *B*) or *Ættartal Nóregs konunga* (according to manuscript *A*). The title *Fagrskinna* ("beautiful parchment"), which is used today to describe this collected work, has only been in use since the 17th century: It was first used by Þormóður Torfason (or *Torfæus*, 1636-1719), the author of a *Historia rerum Norvegi-carum*, in connection with one of the manuscripts (parchment *A*). On *Fagrskinna*, see Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir 1994; Bjarni Einarsson 1993b.

61 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Jón Sigurðarson / Finnur Jónsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (ed./trans.) 1887), p. 410.

62 Cf. Lindow 1976, p. 52 f. Two stanzas of the *Nesjavísur*, shortly after the Battle of Nesjar by the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, document the use of the word *hirð* around 1015-1016. The term also appears in the fourth stanza of the *Bjarkamál*. Some parts of this anonymous poem are old and date back to at least the 10th century. However, the stanzas that are of interest here cannot be dated precisely: This section appears to be younger. It can therefore be assumed that the *Nesjavísur* provide the first known evidence of the term *hirð* in Old Norse literature. The word probably derives from a borrowing of the Old Saxon *hired* (cf. also Kuhn 1956, p. 42 f.).

63 *Germania*, XIII, p. 78 f.

64 In this question, Hans Kuhn's skepticism, whose attitudes often appear hypercritical, is not followed (see introduction above).

65 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 6: [. . .] *gamall vinr kononga, er iafnan haðe i hirðum veret frá barnæsko*. In this context, the use of the word *hirð*

The poetic fragment begins with a solemn request addressed to the noble audience surrounding the skald: *Lyði hringberendr*, "Listen, !" (literally: "ring-bearers" or "sword-bearers").⁶⁶ These *hringberendr* are all members of the royal retinue.

The poet then gives the floor to two strange figures to tell of the ruler's great deeds: A Valkyrie with blond hair (*haddbj- ort*, line 1, v. 7), a white neck (*kverkhvita*, line 2, v. 6) and a dazzling appearance (*glæhvarma*, line 2, v. 5) questions a raven whose bloody beak⁶⁷ and claws⁶⁸ stained by the flesh of corpses give off an odor of decay⁽⁶⁹⁾.

probably an anachronism: the term does not appear in the verses attributed to Þórbjörn hornklofi.

66 In the literal sense, the masculine noun *hringr* refers to a ring. However, in poetic language it is sometimes used as *heiti* for the sword (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 282). Therefore, the masculine term *hringberandi* can mean both "sword-bearer" and

"ring-bearer" (Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 281; *Skj.* A:1, p. 24, B:1, p. 22; *Fagrskinna*

(Bjarni Einarsson (ed.) 1984), p. 59; Jón Helgason 1946, p. 133; cf. also Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1860, p. 396 and Sueti 1884, p. 22, who only consider the literal translation). The poet is obviously referring to the elite among the retainers: No doubt they are favored companions who are honored by the ruler with sumptuous gifts. The

However, the 11th stanza of the "Hafsfjord fragment" (*Haraldskvæði*, Str. 19) describes rings and bracelets made of gold (*hringar handbærir, gullhaugar*), which the king gives to his skalds. This custom is documented by Old Norse *kenningar*, among others, which describe the motif of the "ring giver" (*hringbrjótr, hringdrifi* etc.). Is there a connection between this tradition and the tradition of ring swords, which is documented in detail by archaeological material from the 6th and 7th centuries in Scandinavia as well as in the Anglo-Saxon and continental Germanic world? These ring swords probably refer to the loyalty that binds the warriors of a retinue to their leader (cf. Steuer 1987). Such weapons also appear on the iconographic depictions of animal warriors: the wolf warrior on the sword scabbard from Gutenstein (cf. Garscha 1939) and a similar figure on the bronze fragment from Obrigheim (cf. Hauck 1957a, pl. 2, no. 4, although the details of the redrawing presented there are disputed) carry a ring sword in their hands. In the Scandinavian world, warrior processions whose participants also carry ring swords are depicted on one of the four matrices from Torslunda and on the helmet from tomb XIV of Vendel (cf. Steuer 1987; the motif of the ring sword also possibly appears on another matrix from Torslunda, which depicts the god of war Óðinn next to a wolf warrior; cf. Hauck 1982b, p. 330, fig. 10). Some researchers - such as Peter Paulsen (1967, pp. 90-98) and Karl Hauck (1981b, plate 1) - have attributed this to the

According to the ancient tradition, these rings had the symbolic value of an amulet in connection with the Óðinn cult. The close connection between the animal warriors and the oldest forms of allegiance will be examined in the context of this study (cf. Chapter IX), taking into account the evidence provided by the ring swords.

67 *Skj.* A:1, p. 24, B:1, p. 22, Str. 3, V. 3: *með deyrgu nefi*.

68 *Skj.* A:1, p. 24, B:1, p. 22, str. 3, v. 5: *hold loðir yðr í klóum* (literally: "the flesh clings to your claws").

69 *Skj.* B:1, p. 22, str. 3, v. 6: *hræs þefr gengr ór munni* (literally: "the smell of corpses comes from your beak").

flock. The dark bird, who claims have followed the ruler "since the egg"⁽⁷⁰⁾ enthuses in his reply about the pugnacious character of King Haraldr, the leader of a mighty fleet.

The quotation of the poem breaks off in the sixth stanza. The chronicler of *Fagrskinna* briefly introduces five new stanzas which, according to him, come from the same poem (í *sama cvæðe*).⁷¹ These stanzas describe King Haraldr's most important companions in dialog form. The Valkyrie questions the raven about the elite warriors (*íþróttarmenn*) and then the skalds.

They all receive valuable gifts and excellent weapons from the ruler. After the eleventh verse, the scribe inserts a short commentary dedicated to the king's warriors (an. *kappar*):

Hann tignaðu í sinni fylgð oc firir gongu kappar hans er varo sva agiarner oc uræddir at þær varðu anndværða fylking í orrostu. Hafðu vargstakka firir brynjur.⁷²

(He was revered by the fighters of his followers. They led the way and were so brave and courageous that they stood in the front line of battle. They had wolfskins for breasts).

Two stanzas then appear, announced by the simple words: *sva sem her sægir*. Although the chronicler does not make it explicit at this point, the stanzas obviously belong to the same poem as the previous ones.

70 *Skj.* A:1, p. 25, B:1, p. 22, Str. 4, V. 8: *síðan ór eggí kómum*.

71 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 9.

72 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 11. These last words of the quotation can be compared with chapter IX of the *Vatnsdæla saga* ((Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24 f.), in which the berserkers of King Haraldr are described in the same terms: Þeir *hǫfðu vargstakka fyrir brynjur*. The compound *vargstakkr* ('wolf's [fur] coat') is of particular interest in the context of this work: An. *vargr* denotes the wolf, with the connotation of a vicious beast (in many Germanic legal sources, "warg" terms are used with the meaning "criminal", cf. inter alia Erler 1938; Fowkes 1955; von Unruh 1957; Gerstein 1972; Jacoby 1974). The word *stakkr* refers to a simple and sleeveless piece of clothing, often made of fur or leather - this is mainly documented by the use of the form *skinnstakkr* (cf. Falk 1919, p. 162 f.). According to the legendary *Óláfs saga*, the twelve followers of the Norwegian chieftain Þórir hundr wore this type of coat made of wolf skin on the battlefield of Stiklarstadir around 1030 (Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 192: [. . .] *varo i vargskinzstakcum*). The theme of Þórir's companions, which Otto Höfler has convincingly identified as a troop of animal warriors (Höfler 1940, p. 111 f.), will be taken up again later. The list of clothing names from the word *vargr* also includes the use of the compound *vargskinns-ólpa*, "wolf fur coat" (cf. *Hauks þáttur hábrókar* (Finnur Magnússon / Carl Christian Rafn (ed.) 1835), p. 201: *sjá var mikill maðr í vargskinns ólpu*; cf. Guðbrandr Vigfússon / Carl R. Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 578).

The words addressed to the raven from the beginning of this passage⁷³ and the form of some verses⁷⁴ confirm this impression.

These stanzas clearly describe the role and important status of the beast warriors:

At bersærkia reiðu vil ec
 spyria⁷⁵ bærgir ræsævar
 hversso er fenget
 þeim er i folk vaða
 vig diorfum verom.⁷⁶

(I want to ask you about the equipment of the Berserkers,

Bloodsucker! (= raven)
 As stands it is with them
 who go into battle,
 the bellicose men?)

Vlf heðnar hæita
 þeir er i orrastu
 bloðgar rander bera
 vigrar riða
 er til vigs coma
 þeim er þar sist
 saman.⁷⁷ Aræðesmonnu
 m æinum

73 The expression "sea of corpses" (*hræsævar*) is a Skaldic metaphor denoting blood. The one who drinks the blood of the dead is therefore the raven (cf. Sueti 1884, p. 30 f.; Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 44; *Fagrskinna* [Bjarni Einarsson (ed.) 1984, p. 63]). The form *bergir*, the substantival form of the verb *bergja* ("to enjoy", "to consume", "to drink"), appears here in the singular (cf. Falk 1889, p. 30). There is therefore no reason to connect the metaphor *bergir hræsævar* with the beast warriors, as some translators do (cf. e. Price 2002, p. 367). The Valkyrie is obviously questioning the raven here, to whom she addresses the following words: *vil ec spyria*. The reading of version *A* also contains the pronoun *þik* (*vil ec þik spyria*), possibly due to a contamination from one of the preceding stanzas.

74 The introductory phrase *At berserkja reiðu vil ek spyrja* obviously draws its inspiration from the beginning of the stanza to the skalds: *At skálda reiðu vil ek þik spyrja* [. . .] (*Haraldskvæði*, str. 18). Verses 3 and 4 (*hversu es fengit* / *þeim es i folk vaða*) also imitate the structure of one of the previous stanzas (*Haraldskvæði*, st. 15).

75 The phrase *berserkja reiða*, which can be literally translated as "equipment of the beast warriors", is probably due to the prosody. A similar construction (*skálda reiða*) occurs in one of the preceding stanzas of the same fragment.

76 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 11.

77 Finnur Jónsson, who interprets the reading *sist* as *sýst* (cf. *Flatexjarbók*, 1, p. 568), past participle of *sýsla* ("to become active"), translates this verse as follows: "der har de arbejde, gærninig, sammen, i fællesskab" (Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 557); cf. the translation proposed in *IED*, p. 616: "there they are busied together" (with derivation of *sist* from a defensive verb *sýsa*, "to be busy with a thing"). According to Jón Helgasson (1946, p. 140; 1968, p. 20), however, *sist* is derived from *sissa* ("vísa til sætis", "to leave sitting") (cf. Lindquist (ed.) 1929, p. 7; *Fagrskinna* [Bjarni Einarsson (ed.) 1984], p. 63; *Haraldskvæði* [Fulk (ed./trans.) 2012], p. 115: "there [at Haraldr's court], they are seated together").

hygg ec þar undir felaz,
skyli sa en skilvisi þæim
er i skiold hoggva.⁷⁸

(Úlfheðnar is the name
given to those who
carry bloody shields in
battle,
Spears redden
when they come to fight. There
they are deployed together.
Only the brave men - I
know - are trusted there by
the wise king,
those who hit the shield).

Later in this passage, the chronicler mentions two further stanzas dedicated to players and jugglers (*leikarar og trúðar*).

The "Raven Fragment" thus provides a considerable wealth of information, some of which can make a decisive contribution to understanding the theme: The beast warriors are described as elite fighters who enjoy the king's trust. These wild warriors protect the ruler on the battlefield and form a cohesive force.

But how can the connection between the nouns *úlfheðnar* and *berserkr* (*Úlfheðnar þeir heita*) be explained? If we follow the etymology, the two terms do not seem to be synonymous: The compound *ber-serkr* denotes a warrior clad in a bearskin (cf. the etymon **ber-*, *ursus*), while the compound *úlf-heðinn* indicates the use of wolf skins.⁷⁹

This obvious inconsistency disappears if the word *berserkr* is given a metaphorical meaning. In addition to its original meaning ("bear shirt"), this word also has the general meaning of "animal warrior" in Old Norse literature (cf. Chapter II). Although the element *-serkr* ("shirt") is also present, the term in the Icelandic sagas does not seem to refer to the wearing of a specific item of clothing: The berserker is shown primarily as a fierce warrior whose behavior can be compared to that of a wild animal. This semantic development has undoubtedly been apparent since the time of the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi, as the phrase *Úlfheðnar þeir heita* shows. Nevertheless, the poets of the 9th century still seem to have understood the etymological meaning of the compound *ber-serkr*, as the juxtaposition of the forms *grenjuðu berserkir* and *emjuðu úlfheðnar* in the "Hafrsfjord fragment" suggests.

⁷⁸ *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 11 f.

⁷⁹ See the etymological analysis of these Old Norse terms in chapter II above. If the compound *ber-serkr* is connected with the adjective *ber-*, *nudus*, the formulation *úlfheðnar þeir heita* appears even more paradoxical.

As the archaism of the etymon **ber-*, which was replaced over time by the Old Norse *björn*, clearly proves, the origin of the generic name *berserkr* belongs to a very early stage of the Old Norse tradition, which predates the Viking Age. It cannot therefore be a word created by the Skald Þórbjörn hornklofi - as Klaus von See postulates.

The word *berserkr*, which is used in a limited number of Eddic and Scaldic poems, appears in a whole series of sagas. However, it does not appear in any runic inscriptions - in contrast to the term *úlfheðinn*, which survived in Swedish inscriptions in the form of a personal name (see Chapter I above). The appellative *berserkr*, which is not used in the oldest Swedish and Danish sources (such as the *Gesta Danorum*), therefore seems to have a specifically (West) Norwegian origin. In Iceland, the cultural heritage (skaldic poems, family traditions) passed on by the first Norwegian settlers undoubtedly explains the fate of this term in medieval literature: at the time of the *sagnamenn*, the word *berserkr* had already been common usage for several centuries as a term for angry warriors.

The etymological interpretation of the compound *úlf-heðinn*, which is used much less frequently in Icelandic sources, proves to be less difficult. No one can misunderstand the obvious meaning of the word: The reference to the wolf's fur is obvious to a native Scandinavian speaker. The use of this type of fur in a cultic or martial context is very well documented for the Germanic world.⁸⁰ This tradition undoubtedly still existed at the time of King Haraldr. In the work of the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi, the appellative *úlfheðnar* ('wolf furs') also refers to the warriors known as *berserkir*: The literal meaning of the compound *berserkr* disappears at this point behind the image of a fierce warrior who may be clad in any animal pelt, not necessarily from a bear. Despite its apparent strangeness, the phrase *Úlfheðnar þeir heita* is thus not absurd: we do not agree with Klaus von See when he claims to have discovered the clumsiness of an apocryphal author at this point.⁸¹

However, the stylistic examination of the "Raven Fragment" raises further questions that have given rise to contradictory theses on the original structure of the work.

After a long period of oral tradition, skaldic poetry was handed down until the beginning of the 13th century through sources that are now lost. Under these circumstances, it seems very difficult to assess the authenticity of the texts. The oldest poems, which were written in the 9th century, could be identified with

80 See Chapter IX below on the archaeological finds from Torslunda, Gutenstein and Obrigheim.

81 Cf. von See 1961a, p. 102.

The verses could be enriched with more recent elements, just as other verses could fall into oblivion. These insertions and gaps are difficult to identify, especially as the nature and quality of the first attempts at handwritten fixation are unknown.

The poem Þórbjörn hornklofis is probably not complete in the form handed down by the Norwegian Chronicle. Nevertheless, this "fragment" appears to be a coherent work divided into two parts. The first six stanzas, which are crowned by a long declamation by the raven (stanzas 4-6), are quoted in one piece. The groups of the following stanzas, which are interrupted by prose commentaries, have a change of rhythm: The tempo of the play of questions and answers becomes more hectic. The tone of the last two stanzas moves away from the heroism of the preceding stanzas, but without breaking the thread of the dialog. In addition, the prosody of the last six stanzas appears less homogeneous, which is related to the alternating use of *málaháttir* and *ljóðaháttir*. Nevertheless, these nuances are neither sufficient to the dating of these stanzas, nor their belonging to the original fragment. Nothing proves with certainty the intervention of a second poet - despite the conclusions put forward by Klaus von See.⁸²

This important Germanist believes that vocabulary of the last nine stanzas borrows from more recent poems. This thesis is based on relatively uncertain assumptions, the value of which will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

Long before Klaus von See's work, the first editors of the *Ha- raldskvæði* had already made a radical incision between stanzas 6 and 7 of the "Raven Fragment" was introduced: Unger and Munch inserted the six stanzas of the "Hafrsfjord fragment" there. This new version of the text contradicts the delivery of the *Fagrskinna*, in which the stanzas about the battle are not attributed Þórbjörn hornklofi.

Like the previous fragment, the "Hafrsfjord fragment" contains a reference to the heroic deeds of the beast warriors.

The "Hafrsfjord Fragment", attributed to Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni

After the 15 stanzas of the "Raven Fragment", the *Fagrskinna* reports on King Haraldr's first victories. Two stanzas by the skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir, excerpts from the *Háleygja valley*,⁸³ are quoted for the Battle of Stafanessvággr.⁸⁴

⁸² Cf. von See 1961a, p. 105.

⁸³ It is known that this genealogical poem, dedicated to Jarl Hakon of Lade (*Hákon inn ríki*, "Hakon the Mighty"), was also one of the most important sources for Snorri's *Heim- skringla: Prologus* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1901, 1), pp. 4 f.

⁸⁴ This Old Norse place name, which is no longer attested today, possibly referred to a bay near the headland of Stavenes, which stretches between the Stangfjord and the Stavfjord in the province of Sogn and Fjordane (cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 447 f., note 10).

The author of the chronicle mentions the oath sworn by the king, who is determined not to cut his hair again until he has conquered the entire kingdom⁽⁸⁵⁾. The report then provides a brief description of the Battle of Hafrsfjord in five skaldic stanzas. According to the Fagrskinna tradition, this poetic fragment was written by Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni.⁸⁶

Jón Sigurðsson calls these stanzas *Kvæði um Hafrsfjarðar orustu*. Here, too, the medieval manuscript provides no indication of the name of the fragment.

The first stanza describes the location of the battle (*i Hafrsfirði*) and names King Harald's main opponent: Kjotvi the Rich (*við Kjotvan auðlagða*), who is presented in the chronicler's introductory commentary as a sub-king from the southwest of the north - as other sources also confirm⁽⁸⁷⁾.

The poet then describes the arrival of the richly decorated enemy ships, ready for battle:

Hœyrðu i Hafrsfirði
hve hizug barðez
konongr kynstor við
Kjotvan auðlagða
knerrir como austan
kapps um lystir með
ginandum hofðum oc
grofnum tinglum.⁸⁸

(Did you hear how hard they
fought in the Hafrsfjord?
the noble king
against Kjötvi the rich? Ships
came from the east

85 For this reason, until his victory in the Hafrsfjord, the king was nicknamed *lífa*, "stubble-head" (cf. also the tradition of *Egils saga* and *Harald's þátr hárfagra*). This custom is well documented in the Germanic world, cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, XXXI (Chattian warriors let their hair grow until they have defeated an enemy); Tacitus, *Historiae*, IV, lxi (oath of Batav Civilis); Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, V, xv (oath of the Saxons against the Suebi); Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, III, 7. This type of oath also appears in the poetic *Edda*, cf. *Baldrs draumar*, Str. 11, 5-8. For a general overview of this tradition, see Bächtold-Stäubli 1930/1931, sp. 1260 f.; Rolle / Seemann 1999; Ebel 1999. Höfler (1952a, p. 196 f.) has devoted particular attention to the "sacral" character of the hairstyle among Germanic warriors and rulers in connection with the idea of individual consecration. Cf. also Much / Jankuhn / Lange (ed./trans.) 1967, p. 385 f.

86 The editor of the saga introduces the five stanzas with the following words: [*. . .*] *sva sem sægir Þjóðólfr scalld or Hvíni (Fagrskinna* [Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903], p. 15).

87 Cf. the information provided by Snorri in *Haralds saga hárfagra* (p. 122) or chapter VIII of *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 22 ff.).

88 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 16.

greedy for battle
with gaping heads (= with threatening dragon heads)
and carved stems).

The second stanza describes the magnificent army of Kǫtvi and his allies: The men are equipped with weapons imported from the "West", i.e. from the British Isles and the Carolingian world, which are highly prized in the North.⁸⁹ Finally, the furious animal warriors appear:

Laðner varo þærir
haudda⁹⁰ oc hvitra
skiallda⁹¹ vigra
vestrænna
oc valscra sværða
grænjaðu bersærkir
grunr var þeim a sinnum⁹²
ænn uðu⁹³ ok isar
duðu.⁹⁴

89 On the motif of "Welsh weapons" in Old Norse literature, see Falk 1914, pp. 38-41. The archaeological findings confirm this tradition: many foreign swords of Frankish or Anglo-Saxon origin were in Scandinavia. In the Carolingian world, however, measures were taken to prohibit the export of weapons (Edict of Pîtres of 864 by Charles the Bald: *Edictum Pistense*, ch. XXV, p. 321).

90 The Old Norse *hóldr* ("odal farmer") refers to a landowner who is higher in rank than a free farmer. In a poetic context, the word can also be used in the general sense of "warriors", "men" (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 311).

91 In contrast to the 'white shields' (or 'unpainted') described here, King Harald's ships have 'red shields' attached to them (*rauðum skjöldum*, cf. stanza 5 of the "Raven fragments").

92 The spelling *grunr* ('suspicion', here perhaps in the sense of 'premonition', cf. Lindqvist (ed.) 1929, p. 4) which survives in the manuscripts of version *B* (*AM 302 4to* and *OsloUB 371 fol*), is obviously incorrect. All other versions of the poem (*Fagrskinna A*, *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók*) actually transmit *guðr*. The reading *grunr* in this context is probably a corrupt form of *gunnr* - an old form of *guðr*. The translation of the expression *guðr var þeim á sinnum* proves difficult. The syntax is ambiguous (cf. the remark by Bjarni Einarsson (ed.) 1984 in his edition of the *Fagrskinna* (p. 67) and the commentary on the *Haraldsk-væði* by Fulk (ed./trans.) 2012, p. 103). According to *IED*, p. 529, the neuter *sinn* (or *sinni*) simultaneously has the meaning "walk", "fellowship" and (metaphorically) "help", "support". The phrase *á sinnum* ("on the way", cf. *IED*, p. 529) appears in the *Rígsþula*, Str. 32: *dagr var á sinnom* ("the day is drawing to a close"). However, the expression *vera e-m í sinni* also means

"to accompany, to help someone". The word *guðr* can be understood in the sense of "struggle", but also

as the name of a Valkyrie. Dillmann (2000a, p. 453, note 14) suggests the following translation:

"Gud [la valkyrie] les soutenait". In the *Flateyjarbók*, however, the reading *guðr er þeim hlíf* occurs. The presence of the Valkyrie on the battlefield has a special value here: by accompanying the beast warriors, she probably demonstrates their connection with Óðinn.

93 *Fagrskinna A* transmits *ymðu* and version *B* *ænn uðu*. At this point, the verb *enjuðu* which is handed down in the manuscripts of the *Heimskringla*.

94 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 16.

(They carried
 warriors and white
 shields, Western spears
 and Welsh swords. The
 berserkers roared,
 the battle was on for them; the
 wolf pelts howled and iron
 swung).

Verses 5 and 7 of this stanza clearly the belligerence of these warriors, whose roars are reminiscent of the howling and growling of wild animals: *gren-juðu berserkir*, *emjuðu úlfheðnar*. These people not only wear the fur of a tiger, they also imitate its behavior.

How can the coexistence of similar expressions for animal warriors be interpreted? Do the words *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir* denote members of the same group or, on the contrary, do they refer to different groups ("wolf coats" and "bear shirts"), each with its own "uniform" and battle cry (cf. the verbs *grenjuðu* and *emjuðu*)?⁹⁵ At this point, the tradition of the "Hafrsfjord fragment" - viewed in isolation - proves to be ambiguous. The comparison with the text of the "Raven Fragment", in which the two terms are used synonymously, argues in favor of retaining the former solution.

However, the verse quoted raises another question, as it gives no indication of the exact position of the beast warriors during the Battle of Hafrsfjord. Are the berserkers part of King Haraldr's troops or do they fight in the ranks of his opponents? The "Hafrsfjord Fragment" hardly gives a precise answer to this question. However, the first verse of this work refers to Kjötví's troops. The Icelandic historiographical and literary tradition provides relevant information, the reliability of which is difficult to determine, as the sources on which the *sagnamenn* are based, with the exception of the *Haraldsk-*

95 The motif of "cries" emitted by animal warriors appears in the following sources, among others: *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Flat), ch. CCXXIII (Guðbrandr Vigfússon / Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 269 = Þorvalds þáttur víðþrila); *Kristni saga*, ch. II (Eiríkur Jónsson / Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1892/1896, p. 127); *Egils saga*, chap. LXIV (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 202); *Grettis saga*, chap. XL (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, p. 136); *Vatnsdæla saga*, chap. XLVI (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 124); *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, ch. XIV, p. 370 f.; *Heiðreks saga*, ch. III and V (Rafn (ed.) 1829, pp. 416-425); *Qrvar-Odds saga*, ch. XIV (Rafn (ed.) 1829, pp. 211 and 213); *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, chap. III, p. 368; *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, chap. IV and VIII, pp. 470 and 481-483; *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. XXX, p. 322, with the phrase *Röndólfr var hamaðr ok grenjaði sem tröll* ("Röndólfr was enchanted and roared/howled like a troll"); *Hjálmþérs saga ok Qlvis*, ch. VII, p. 466; *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, ch. IX (Loth (ed.) 1962, p. 29); *Hektors saga*, ch. VI, p. 102 and XX, p. 166; *Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, ch. XII; cf. also the *Hrings rimur ok Tryggva* (also *Geðraunir*) XI, 47, 57, XII, 19. This list of references, which is not exhaustive, is taken from Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, pp. 332 f.

væði are not recorded. In the *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson introduces one of the king's main opponents as a "mighty beast warrior"⁹⁶ as the *Grettis saga* also confirms.⁹⁷ It is Þórir haklangr, whose name appears in the third stanza of the "Hafrsfjord fragment". However, the text of the *Grettis saga* gives the impression that berserkers used on both sides. According to the tradition of the *Vatnsdæla saga* and the *Egils saga*, however, the beast warriors are exclusively at the bow of King Haraldr's ship.⁹⁸ As these medieval prose works were obviously inspired by skaldic sources, the authors were able to combine the memory of the "Hafrsfjord fragment" with echoes of the "Raven fragment": The latter clearly describes the presence of berserkers at King Haraldr's side, without mentioning the name of a specific battle. Beyond the variations in detail, all these texts nevertheless unanimously confirm the existence of beast warriors in 9th century Norway. The end of the 'Hafrsfjord fragment' provides no further reference to the use of berserkers. In the third stanza, the battle reaches its climax with the death of Þórir haklangr:

Fræistaðu ens framraða
er þeim flya kændi
allvallz Austmanna⁹⁹ er
byr a Utstæini¹⁰⁰
stoðom nockva bra
stillir¹⁰¹ er hanum var
styriar væne glommon var
a lifðum aðr en Haklangr
felle.¹⁰²

96 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1901, I, p. 123.

97 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 5.

98 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 25; *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), The second of these two works ascribes lycanthropic traits to both Egil's grandfather and father. These two beast warriors, who are not present at the Battle of Hafrsfjord, oppose the authority of the Norwegian ruler with unbending passion. 99 The term *allvaldr Austmanna* ('lord of the men of the east') probably refers to the area in which King Haraldr's inheritance extended, namely in Vik, in the east of the Scandinavian mountain range (cf. Jón Helgason 1946, p. 143, note 3).

100 The words *es býr at Útsteini* ('he who dwells on Utstein') refer to one of the royal residences built on the island of Utstein off the west coast of Norway (*Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. XXXVII, p. 155). Haraldr probably took possession of this area after the Battle of Hafrsfjord - this victory had assured him control of Rogaland. In the verse *es býr at Útsteini*, the verb *búa* is in the present tense, although the other verbs in the verse are in the past tense. This nuance seems to indicate that the king is only firmly established after the battle Utstein and not before, as Klaus von See (1961a, p. 108) suggests.

101 The neuter *stóð* denotes a herd of horses; *Nökkvi* is a "sea king". The horses of Nökkvi are therefore ships.

102 *Fagrskinna* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1902/1903), p. 17.

(They challenged the daredevil who
 taught them to flee,
 the all-rounder of the Eastmen,
 who lives in Utstein.
 The king steered the stallions from Nökkvi
 as he awaited the battle.
 It crashed on the shields
 until Haklang fell.)

Who are these enemies that the ruler swept away when they came to "challenge" him (v. 1: *freista*, "to test someone")? Are they the animal warriors of the previous verse or the entire troop of Kjǫtvi? Here, too, it is difficult to make a decision.

The fourth and fifth stanzas do nothing to clarify the story: They describe Kjǫtvi's escape, his last refuge on a small island in the fjord and the sinking of his fleet.

The "Hafrsfjord Fragment" thus offers a rather laconic account of the course of events. Nevertheless, the age of this source gives it exceptional value for the knowledge of Old Norse war traditions: Its dating has never been questioned by philology. Klaus von See, who is skeptical about some passages of the "Raven Fragment", has no doubts about the authenticity of the stanzas about the Hafrsfjord.

Scholars, on the other hand, hardly agree on the nature of the connections between the two fragments. Were they written at the same time, as the medieval authors claim? Contrary to the information provided by *Fagrskinna*, should all the stanzas be to the same poet? Do both passages belong to the same work, as Unger and Munch claim?

Before a contribution can be made to this debate, the two fragments should be examined in the versions provided in the other sources.

2 The text of the *Heimskringla*

The "Tale of Harald Fairhair" (*Haralds saga hárfagra*) is, after the "Tale of the Ynglingar" (*Ynglinga saga*) and the "Tale of Halfdan the Black" (*Hálfðanar saga svarta*), the last account of the *Heimskringla* in which berserkers are mentioned.

The motif of animal warriors is mentioned three times in *Harald's saga hárfagra*. Snorri Sturluson first mentions the presence of berserkers among the ruler's followers. These elite warriors stand at the bow of the royal ship:

Um v́́rit réð Haraldr konungr sér til skipa. Hann hafði gera látit um vetrinn dreka¹⁰³ mikinn ok búinn it vegligsta; þar skipaði hann á hirð sinni ok berserkjum; stafnbúar v́́ru mest vandaðir, þv́́at þeir h́́fðu merki konungs. Aþr frá stafninum til austrúms var kallat á rausn;⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ þat var skipat berserkjum. Þeir einir náðu hirðvist með Haraldí konungi, er afreksmenn v́́ru bæði at afli ok hreysti ok allz konar atgervi; þeim einum var skipat hans skip; en hann átti þá góð v́́l at kjósa ór hverju fylki sér hirðmenn.¹⁰⁵

(In the spring, King Haraldr prepared his ship. He had had a large dragon ship built in the winter and had it splendidly equipped; he brought his retinue and the berserkers onto it; the men at the stem were chosen with the utmost care as they carried the king's banner. The space between the stem and the austrúm (the space in the forecabin for bailing out the water) was called rausn and was assigned to the berserkers. Only those who were outstanding men in strength, bravery and every kind of prowess attained the position of retainers of King Haraldr; they alone were taken to his ship, although he had to make a good selection of retainers from each district).

Berðlu-Kári, a berserker of great renown, appears in the course of the work. This Norwegian of noble descent, who is mentioned in several medieval sources⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ first fights alongside Jarl Rognvaldr before swearing allegiance directly to King Haraldr:

Eptir þat kom Berðlu-Kári til Rognvaldz jarls með langskip alskipat, ok fóru þeir báðir norðr á Mœri; tók Rognvaldr jarl skip þau, er átt hafði Vémundr konungr, ok alt lausafé, þat er hann fékk. Berðlu- Kári fór norðr á fund Haraldz konungs ok gerðisk hans maðr; hann var berserkr mikill.¹⁰⁷

(After that Berðlu-Kári came to Jarl Rognvaldr with a well-equipped longship, and they both sailed north to Møre; Jarl Rognvaldr took possession of the ships King Vémundr had had and all the loose property he got. Berðlu- Kári sailed north to King Haraldr's court and became his retainer; he was a great berserker).

Finally, the Icelandic historian also describes the intervention of a mighty beast warrior in the Battle of Hafsfjrd: Þórir haklang,¹⁰⁸ son of Kjótvi the Rich, King of Agder¹⁰⁹ - one of King Haraldr's main opponents.

103 The masculine word *dreki*, "dragon" (in this context "dragon ship"), is often used in Old Norse literature to refer to a warship - usually the private property of a king (cf. Falk 1912, pp. 39 f., 105 f.; Dillmann 2000a, p. 442).

104 For the Old Norse terms for the various parts of the ship (especially *stafn*, *austrúm* and *rausn*), see Falk 1912, pp. 82-85.

105 *Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. IX, p. 107 f.

106 Cf. e.g. *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), ch. I and following.

107 *Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. XII, p. 113 f.

108 Þórir haklangr. The most common interpretation of the byname *haklangr* is "long chin" (cf. Jón Helgason 1946, p. 143).

109 *Kjótvi inn auði, konungr af Ögðum*. Agder is an area in southern Norway. The nickname Kjótvi comes from the noun *kjót* ("meat") and is meant to denote a "fat man" ("un homme corpulent", cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 451, note 2). The man's real name is Asbjörn (*Ásbjörn*).

Þórir, who attacks King Harald's ship, turns out to be a terrible mountain man who fights to the death:¹¹⁰

Þórir haklangr hafði lagt skip sitt í móti skipi Haraldz konungs ok var Þórir berserkr mikill;
var þar allhqrð atsókn, áðr Þórir haklangr fell; var þá hroðit alt skip hans.

(Þórir haklangr had laid his ship against King Harald's ship, and Þórir was a great berserker.
It was a very hard fight before Þórir haklangr fell; then his whole ship was cleared).

Snorri then quotes the five stanzas of the "Hafrsfjord fragment" in his report.

At first glance, the information provided by *Harald's saga hárfagra* on the beast warriors seems plausible. However, it proves to be difficult to verify: The description of the berserkers is inspired by sources of no trace, with the exception of the skaldic stanzas.¹¹¹ Snorri undoubtedly collected a large amount of oral tradition in Norway¹¹². Part of this heritage has also been preserved among the descendants of the Norwegian settlers in Iceland.

The Oddi court - where Snorri was educated under the tutelage of Jón Loftsson, grandson of the Norwegian king Magnus Barefoot - was one of the intellectual centers of the Nordic island. Snorri thus grew up in an educated milieu associated with the Norwegian royal dynasty ("particulièrement versé dans l'étude du passé et directement apparenté à la dynastie norvégienne")¹¹³. His erudition was probably based on the knowledge of solid sources passed on to him by his teachers and their predecessors.¹¹⁴ Does the *Fagrskinna* belong to these sources? This question remains unanswered.

The version of the "Hafrsfjord fragment", which is provided in the *Haralds saga hárfagra*, nevertheless remains very close to text found in the Norwegian chronicle. Here, too, the five stanzas are quoted consecutively.

Some variants without relevance to the present question appear in different manuscripts. In the verse to the beast warriors,

inn Kjǫtvi), as recorded in the *Vatnsdæla saga* (chapter VIII). The kinship relations between Þórir and Kjǫtvi, which are clearly shown by Snorri, are neither mentioned in the skaldic sources nor in the *Fagrskinna*.

¹¹⁰ *Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. XVIII, p. 123.

¹¹¹ In his work, Snorri does not quote the two stanzas of the "Raven Fragment" that concern the animal warriors.

¹¹² It is worth remembering Snorri's first stay in Norway at the court of King Hákon from 1218 to 1220. It is known that the Icelander traveled the country on this occasion and spent most of his time on the west coast (cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 11).

¹¹³ Dillmann 2000a, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ On Snorri's intellectual training and the sources of the *Heimskringla*, see the introduction in Dillmann (transl.) 2000, pp. 7-40 (reprint: Dillmann 2000a).

the last verse ends once with *duþo* (orthographic variant of *duðu*),¹¹⁵ another time with *gullu* (from the verb *gjalla*)¹¹⁶ or *glumdo* (from the verb *glumja*).¹¹⁷ The *Fagrskinna* always transmits *duðu* (from the verb *dýja*).

In essence, however, the Icelandic and Norwegian traditions are in agreement. Snorri Sturluson's tradition nevertheless differs from the others in one respect: The author of *Heimskringla* attributes the "Hafrsfjord fragment" to the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi. The use of the expression *svá segir Hornklofi*¹¹⁸ is unambiguous: the names Þórbjörn and Þjóðólfr could not have been confused by the copyists.

In addition to the 'Hafrsfjord fragment', *Harald's saga hárfagra* contains other stanzas written by Þórbjörn. One of them belongs to the "raven fragment".¹¹⁹ Long excerpts from the *Glymdrápa* are also quoted. In comparison, stanzas attributed the skald Þjóðólfr are much rarer in this saga. Is Snorri too inclined to assume the authorship of the poet Þórbjörn hornklofi? In the prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri nevertheless mentions work as one of his main sources (although in this context it is the genealogical poem *Ynglingatal*).

The "Hafrsfjord fragment" and the "Raven fragment" have obvious stylistic similarities. These are based above all on the use of a uniform meter and common idioms. Snorri undoubtedly relies on this argument to attribute all the stanzas of the "Hafrsfjord fragment" as well as the sixth stanza of the "Raven fragment", which he also quotes in *Harald's saga hárfagra* (ch. XV), to Þórbjörn. All in all, this assumption forbids any

115 Readings *J1* and *J2* (cf. *AM 37 fol* and *AM 38 fol*, copies made in the 16th and 17th centuries respectively, on the parchment manuscript *Jöfraskinna*; this manuscript, which dates to the first half of the 14th century, was destroyed - with the exception of a few leaves - during the fire in Copenhagen in 1728).

116 Reading of *F* (*AM 45 fol*, *Codex Frisianus*, manuscript from the first quarter of the 14th century; this is the only surviving medieval parchment manuscript that the entire *Heimskringla* with the exception of the *saga helga*). With the reading *gullu*, the translation of the last verse of this stanza thus reads: "the weapons shouted", i.e. "clashed with noise".

117 Reading of *K* (cf. *AM 35 fol*, copy from the last decades of the 17th century, based on the *Kringla* manuscript; this manuscript, which dates to the middle of the 13th century, also destroyed - with the exception of a single leaf - during the fire in Copenhagen). The reading *glumdo* gives the last verse the following meaning: "the weapons resound". Cf. Fulk (ed.) 2012, p. 103, who prefers the reading *dúðu*.

118 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1901, I, p. 124.

119 This is the sixth stanza of the "Raven Fragment" (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1901, I, p. 120). In *K*, the stanza is attributed to Þórbjörn hornklofi, while *F* mentions Þjóðólfr and *J1* contains only the letter *Þ*.

However, Snorri Sturluson does not any further details on this.

The philologist Friedrich Sueti, who is convinced that he recognizes the hand of the poet Þórbjörn hornklofi in the "Hafrsfjord Fragment", considers the use the expression *allvaldr Austmanna* to be a convincing indication: This formulation, which describes Harald's subordinates as "men of the East", points to the presumed origin of the skald Þórbjörn, who, according to Sueti, came from the Norse colonies in Ireland or Scotland. However, as the Old Norse sources provide little information about Þórbjörn's life, this assumption cannot be proven.¹²¹ The *Fagrskinna*, moreover, presents Þórbjörn as an old friend of the king who had been a member of the *hirð* "from childhood".

In the context of the poem, the word *austmanna* probably does not refer to the Norwegians as a whole: it could a reference to the ruler's family roots in Vík. At the time of the Battle of Hafrs- fjord, Haraldr was attempting to extend his rule to the western regions of the country (Agder, Rogaland, etc.). The controversial interpretation of the expression *all- valdr Austmanna* does not allow the identity of the poet to be established with certainty. In the *Ynglinga valley*, however, Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni refers to the Swedish king or Swedes as *austrkonungr* or *austmørk* (if the reading of *AM 38 fol*, *Jöfraskinna* 2, is correct) - which contradicts the hypothesis that this skald was the

"Hafrsfjordfragment" could speak for itself¹²².

Beyond the contradictions in connection with the name of the skald, the "Hafrsfjord fragment" can be found in the same form in three different sources: *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók*. The similarities in these manuscripts demonstrate the popularity of the poem, which is undoubtedly linked to the memory of the Battle of Hafrsfjord. In comparison, the tradition of the "Raven Fragment" occupies a modest place in the literary heritage of medieval Iceland: While the *Fagrskinna* quotes 15 stanzas of this work, the *Heimskringla* and the *Flateyjarbók* contain only isolated stanzas.

120 This is particularly the case in Friedrich Sueti 1884, p. 19 f.: In line with Snorri Sturluson's opinion, both fragments are attributed to Þórbjörn hornklofi without being combined into one poem.

121 The *Skálda saga Haralds konungs hárfagra*, which very little historical value, attributes Norwegian descent to Þórbjörn - although this does not prevent the assumption of a connection with the Irish or Scottish coastal areas settled early by Norwegians (cf. Sueti 1884, pp. 9 and 18 f.). The term *austmanna* also appears in a *Lausavísa* attributed to Þórbjörn in the *Skálda saga*.

122 Cf. Fulk (ed./trans.) 2012, p. 104.

The mention of the berserkers in the "Hafrsfjord Fragment" clearly refers to a contemporary tradition of the events described. Should the same value be ascribed to the information in the "Raven Fragment"?

Before addressing this question, the last source, the *Flateyjarbók*, will be briefly examined.

3 The text of the *Flateyjarbók*

Among many accounts compiled in the *Flateyjarbók* (GKS 1005 fol, *Codex Flateyensis*)¹²³ is the *Haralds þáttur hárfagra* ("Tale of Harald Schönhaar"), whose text includes several quotations from skaldic poems.

This work, which was written towards the end of the 14th century, contains a short excerpt from the "Raven Fragment". It is the verse dedicated to the beast warriors: *Vlfhednar hæita þeir*.

The *Codex Flateyensis* transmits a version that clearly differs from the reading of the *Fagrskinna*. In *Harald's þáttur*, the last four verses actually take the following form:

Arædismonnum einum
hygg ek þar hæfa at standa
þa er skatnar skiluisir j
skiold hoggua.¹²⁴

(To the bold men alone
- I think - it is appropriate to stand where
reliable warriors
into the shield).

This variant does not contradict the basic information that emerges from the *Fagrskinna* lore: the beast warriors are still described as elite warriors.

The lines preceding the poetic quotation are in turn directly inspired by the text of *Fagrskinna*:

Hann tignnada j sinne fylgd ok framgongu kappar þeir er suo voru agiarnnir ok ohreðdir at þeir uordu onduerda fylking konungs. þeir hofdu uargstakka firir bryniur sem segir Audun illskellda.¹²⁵

123 The manuscript was begun towards the end of the 14th century by two Icelandic priests, Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson, and subsequently completed in the 15th century. The authors of this remarkable compilation had access to sources that are now lost - at least in their original form.

124 *Harald's þáttur hárfagra*, p. 568.

125 *Harald's þáttur hárfagra*, p. 568.

(Among his followers, he was revered by these fighters who advanced. They were so brave and courageous that they were at the forefront of the king's army in battle. They had wolfskins for breasts, as Audun illskellda reports).

However, the author of *Harald's þátttr* contradicts his Norwegian model in one respect: he attributes the verse to the skald Aude. Does this attribution refer to sources that are now lost? There is no information available on this question.

While the *Flateyjarbók* only quotes a single stanza of the "Raven Fragment", it reproduces the five stanzas of the "Hafrsfjord Fragment" *in extenso*.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Incidentally, the version of the *Codex Flateyensis* remains very close to the older readings provided the *Fagrskinna* and the *Heimskringla*.

The verse about the berserkers (*Hladnir voru þeir holda*) retains the same form, apart from minor changes:

Greniudu
besserkir¹²⁷ gudr er
þeim
hlifde¹²⁸ eniuduisarnn
bitu.¹²⁹

(The berserkers roared,
Guðr protected
them; the wolfskins
howled, the swords bit).

Beyond the skaldic stanzas, the phenomenon of animal warriors is also mentioned in *Harald's þátttr* in connection with the figure of the berserker Berðlu-Kári.

The narrated episode in the *Flateyjarbók* corresponds word for word to the text of the *Heimskringla*:

Eftir þat kom Berdlukare til Rognualldz jalls med langskip alskipat og foru badir norðr a Mære. tok Rognualldr skip þau er att hafde Uemundr konungur ok allt þat lausafe er hann fek. Berdlukare for norðr j Þrandheim a fund Haralldz konungs hann var besserkr mikill ok gerðizst hans madr.¹³⁰

Since the description of the berserkers in *Harald's þátttr* is essentially based on the tradition of the *Heimskringla* and the *Fagrskinna*, this narrative does not provide any new, decisive information for the investigation of the beast warriors.

126 *Harald's þátttr hárfagra*, p. 574.

127 The spelling *besserkir* is obviously wrong.

128 Gudr here seems to correspond to the name of the Valkyrie. In *IED*, p. 271, *hlif* is translated as "cover, shelter, protection".

129 From *bíta*, "to bite".

130 *Haralds þátttr hárfagra*, p. 573. See above the translation of the corresponding paragraph from the *Heimskringla*.

C The *Haraldskvæði* and the beast warriors: the value of tradition

Fewer than ten works in the entire repertoire of Old Norse poetry mention the berserkers.¹³¹ Within this tradition, stanzas 8, 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði* have an extraordinary significance: they link the motif of animal warriors to a specific period in Norse history, corresponding to the reign of King Harald Schönhaar. According to medieval tradition, the three stanzas were composed by skalds who came from the Norwegian ruler's circle. Most philologists do not question the authenticity of this tradition and attribute outstanding historical value to these few verses. Only one scholar, Klaus von See, contradicts this interpretation: in his eyes, the skaldic verses provide no credible information about the phenomenon of animal warriors. However, an examination of the ancient sources leads to a much more differentiated view.

At first glance, however, Klaus von See seems to follow a perfectly legitimate critical approach: The text of the *Haraldskvæði*, which re-constructed in the 19th century, combines fragments the medieval tradition never combined. However, the German philologist does not distance himself from the arbitrary approach of his predecessors. In his "Studien zum Haraldskvæði", he also detaches himself from the legacy of the manuscript sources by limiting himself to challenging the dating of the poem without radically changing the composition proposed by Unger and Munch. Klaus von See always attributes the first six stanzas of the "Raven Fragment", the five stanzas of the "Hafrsfjord Fragment" and the half-stanza from Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* to the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi, which he considers to belong together.

Klaus von See considers the last eleven stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* to be an apocryphal product of the 12th century. According to this interpretation, stanzas 20 and 21 are to be regarded as a poor paraphrase of stanza 8; they do not contribute any further, reliable information on the motif of the berserkers. Klaus von See describes "the whole part of stanza 20/21" as "particularly meaningless"⁽¹³²⁾.

This analysis of the poem seems questionable insofar as it does not take into account the handwritten tradition. On the contrary, it is advisable to refer to the tradition of the sources without relying on the reconstructions of the 19th century to be influenced.

The medieval texts always present the "Raven Fragment" and the "Hafrsfjord Fragment" as different works. With regard to the correspondence of the

131 Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 45; von See 1961a, p. 129 ff.

132 Cf. von See 1961a, p. 102.

sources, the arguments that have been put forward since Unger and Munch to unite the two texts seem relatively weak. The similarities between the two fragments (reference to similar themes, use of an identical meter, the phrase *Heyrðir þú*) provide too uncertain evidence to be able to disregard the opinion of the old authors, who never combined the two fragments into one poem.

This statement refers *a fortiori* to the four verses of stanza 12, which are completely isolated in the *Snorra Edda*.

Several philologists, including Klaus von See, also delete stanzas 13 and 14, which are dedicated to King Haraldr's marriage to the Danish princess Ragnhildr: The tone of this section does indeed contrast with the heroic character of the other stanzas. The thesis of a staged development undoubtedly allows us to explain the lack of unity in the poem¹³³ but it finds no confirmation in the manuscripts.

Only Snorri Sturluson seems to establish a direct connection between the "Hafrsfjord fragment" and the "Raven fragment", from which he quotes only one stanza: Without explicitly referring to the two poem fragments as parts of a single work, the author of *Heimskringla* attributes their origin to the same skald (Þórbjörn hornklofi). However, this opinion is contradicted by three sources, one of which, incidentally, comes from Snorri himself: *Gylfaginning*, *Fagrskinna*¹³⁴ and *Flateyjarbók*.

For all these reasons, it seems appropriate to assume the existence of two independent poems by Þórbjörn or his contemporary Þjóðólfr.¹³⁵ These texts present a unified picture of animal warfare in 9th-century Norway.

Contrary to the interpretation based on the manuscript evidence, Klaus von See's arguments are based on mostly subjective judgments, especially when the philologist insistently disparages the style of the last stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*. The comparative criteria he uses turn out to be tendentious.¹³⁶ They are based on a new orientation of the text that never corresponds to the content of the sources. Some findings turn out to be wrong. One of the examples chosen by Klaus von See will be examined in more detail here: The name

133 Cf. de Vries 1999, pp. 136-140.

134 For the author of *Fagrskinna*, there is no possibility of confusion between the two skalds: Following the five stanzas of *Fagrskinna* attributed to the skald Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni "Hafrsfjordfragments" he quotes three stanzas in connection with the same battle, which belong to the *Glymdrápa* Þórbjörn hornklofis. In the *Heimskringla* and the *Flateyjarbók*, however, these stanzas are quoted with reference to other victorious battles of Haraldr against petty kings of western Norway (cf. the commentary by Edith Marold in *Skaldic Poetry*, I. 1, Part 1, p. 82).

135 The name of the skald Aude should be deleted, as he is only mentioned in isolation in the most recent source (*Flateyjarbók*).

136 Cf. von See 1961a, p. 101 f.

King Haraldr, who is often replaced by a metaphor in the first part of *Haraldskvæði*, appears five times in the eleven final stanzas. Apparently, the repeated use of the name contradicts the virtuosity at the beginning of the work. However, a reading of the manuscript allows a different picture to be drawn: The name 'Haraldr' appears in one of the two stanzas about the royal wedding (stanza 13); it is used six times in the 'Raven Fragment' (stanzas 1, 4, 16, 18, 19 and 22 of *Haraldskvæði*), but never occurs in the 'Hafsfjord Fragment'.

Klaus von See also emphasizes the repetitive character of certain formulations that are used partly in the first twelve and partly in the last eleven stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*. From this perspective, the end of the poem seems like a subordinate imitation that was added later to the first and older part. Again, the suggested clues are hardly helpful: the expression *konungr en kynstóri* appears in stanza 7 as well as in stanza 14, but the medieval sources never connect the latter stanza with other fragments. Furthermore, the similarities that Klaus von See believes to have discovered between the various passages seem very tenuous (a parallel between the expression *odda íþróttir*¹³⁷ in stanza 1 and the compound *íþróttirmenn*¹³⁸ in stanza 15; use of the verb *ráða* in stanzas 5 and 19, of the noun *væni* in stanzas 9 and 17, of the participle *grafinn* in stanzas 7 and 19). Apart from the expression *konungr enn kynstóri*, Klaus von See gives no other example of literal repetition in the poem. It must be noted that the terms *væni* and *grafinn* reappear in various fragments in the manuscripts. The same applies, of course, to the appellatives *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*. We therefore cannot agree with Klaus von See, who interprets stanzas 20 and 21 as glosses without meaning, inspired by the last verses of stanza 8.

In the eyes of the German scholar, the phrasenar *þeir heita*, used in connection with the *berserkir* at the beginning of stanza 21, gives the impression of being "a limping, schoolmasterly commentary on stanza 8 . . ."¹³⁹.

Klaus von See's opinion is clearly based on a very narrow interpretation of the term *berserkr*, which he attributes solely to its etymological meaning (**ber-serkr* = "bear's shirt"). This approach is not satisfactory, as has already clearly shown. In the Old Norse tradition

137 Literally: "feats of arms". In the context of *Haraldskvæði*, this metaphor refers to the heroic deeds of the King of Norway.

138 The word can be translated in this context as "fighter", "elite warrior". The literal meaning of *íþróttamaðr* denotes an experienced, talented man who masters several artistic and athletic disciplines (an. *íþrótt*, "accomplishment", "art", "skill", cf. *IED*, p. 320).

139 Cf. von See 1961a, p. 102.

the generic name *berserkr* generally denotes a "fierce" warrior without reference to specific clothing; this common interpretation far outweighs the original meaning of the word, which seems to have disappeared relatively early - at the same time as the root **ber-* was replaced by the form *björn*, presumably during the Late Norse period (ca. 500-800).

The nouns *úlfheðnar* and *berserkir* can therefore be used for the same person without contradiction: The term *úlf-heðinn* ("wolf coat") clearly evokes a man dressed in a wolf skin. This custom has been documented in the Germanic world since ancient times (cf. the matrices from Torslunda, the sword scabbard from Gutenstein, the bronze fragment from Obrigheim or the pressed sheet metal model from Fen Drayton). The fits of rage that are often attributed to the berserkers in the Islander sagas and whose description points to ancient beliefs regarding "real" or "psychic" transformative abilities (cf. the words or expressions *hammramr*, *eigi einhamr*, *hamask*, *skipta hǫmum* etc.), as well as the werewolves, as well as the werewolf traits associated with famous beast warriors (cf. Kveld-Úlfr from the *Egils saga*), allow us to evaluate the statement of the author of the "Raven Fragment", who refers to the *Úlfheðnar* as *berserkir*, as the expression of an authentic tradition. The name of *thenar*¹⁴⁰ undoubtedly refers to the clothing worn certain berserkers, as well as to the ability of these warriors to behave like wild animals (cf. the cries and howls mentioned in the "Hafrsfjord fragment").

Finally, the two arguments put forward by Klaus von See against the traditional dating of the "Raven fragment" must also be refuted: the extension of the original "Hafrsfjord fragment" by later stanzas and the existence of possible anachronisms.

According to Klaus von See, the last stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* are inspired by a text known as *Atlamál*. This poem, which survives in the *Codex Regius*, is one of the most recent works of the Song *Edda*: it was undoubtedly not composed before the 12th century - perhaps on Greenland⁽¹⁴¹⁾.

140 It is, of course, the generic name *úlfheðinn*, and not a plural form of the given name *Úlfheðinn*, which the poet would have created based on the model of some names of mythical dynasties from the Old Norse tradition (cf. the *Ylfingar*, the *Hjaðningar* or the *Volsungar*). The plural *Úlfheðnar* is not known in any source as a sibling name or gender: The word *úlfheðnar*, which appears in the *Grettis saga*, chap. II (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936: þeir vóru kallaðir úlfheðnar) or in the *Vatnsdæla saga*, chap. IX (þeir berserkir er úlfheðnar vóru kal- laðir) also corresponds to the plural of the appellative; these texts are directly influenced by the "Hafrsfjord fragment" in their description of the course of the battle (see chap. IV below). The sentence þeir berserkir er úlfheðnar vóru kallaðir can undoubtedly be compared with the phrase þeir heita from the 'Raven Fragment'.

141 Cf. Finch 1993.

In fact, Scandinavians have long ago noted the use of some similar idioms in the two poems (cf. e.g. *Haraldskvæði*, st. 17 and *Atlamál*, st. 37). However, does this observation allow us to think that the last stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* were written at a later date, while *Atlamál* should be regarded as an older work?

The *Haraldskvæði* impressively describes the fighting spirit of the Norse warriors. The king's companions, eager to attack the enemy ships, rush into battle with such zeal and row so hard that they are not afraid to damage their own boat:

Þá eru þeir reifir,
es vitu rómu væni,
orvir upp at hlaupa
ok árar at sveigja,
hømlur at brjóta en
háir at slíta;
ríkuliga hygg ek þá vórruat vísa
ráði.¹⁴²

(Then they are in a more cheerful
mood when they have the fight in
sight, ready to jump up
and bend the oars, tear off
the oar bands
and tearing up the rudder cleats.

They accelerate - I think - enormously the rudder strokes at
the command of the ruler).

In the *Atlamál*, the impetuosity of Gunnarr and Högni's companions, who row with firm determination to the land of Atli, has exactly the same effect: *hømlor slitnoðo, háir brotnoðo* (Str. 37). The two poems thus describe similar

142 *Haraldskvæði* 17 (this stanza corresponds to stanza 9 of the "Raven Fragment"), *Skaldic Poetry*, I. 1, Part 1, p. 111. Some philologists, to the usual meaning of the Icelandic words *hár* ("dolle, rudder cleat" - a piece of wood attached to the gunwale of a ship and to support the oars) and *hamla* ("rudder strap"), have suggested that the order of the verbs - as it appears in the *Fagrskinna* manuscripts - should be changed: Finnur Jónsson connects (*Skj.* B:1, p. 24) *hamla* with *slíta* ("to cut, tear") and *hár* with *brjóta* ("to break"). This correction is of course based on a comparison with the *Atlamál* (Str. 37, 5 f.: *hømlor slitnoðo, háir brotnoðo*). In his commentary on the *Haraldskvæði*, however, Jón Helgason (1946, p. 138, note 9) recommends retaining the original form of the text, since the word *hamla* in Norway could have referred to the entire device for fastening the oars (cf. an. *keipr*) - which possibly refers to an archaic custom. If the author of the *Atlamál* had borrowed the phrase *hømlur at brjóta / en háir at slíta* from the older "raven fragment", then he would logically have had to change the order of the words, because in his eyes the term *hamla* referred to the oar strap. On the Old Norse terminology of raven, see Sandström 2015.

Situations: In both cases, the ship's crew puts so much energy into the oars that the ship's dolphin breaks and the oarlocks snap (aisl. *hár*, pl. *háir*, "dolphin", "oar cleat"; aisl. *hamla*, pl. *hømlur*, "oarlocks", "rowing troop"). These Old Norse verses are often accompanied by a famous epi sode in the *Song of the Nibelungs* (Str. 1564): When crossing the Danube, the oars also shatter in the hands of the hero Hagen.

The *Atlamál* and the *Song of the Nibelungs* refer to the same epic tradition, which describes the story of Kriemhild's revenge (Guðrún in the Norse tradition). The relationship between the two works is made clear not least by the common mention of famous legendary figures such as Hagen and his Scandinavian counterpart Høgni. There is no doubt that some of the saga motifs and stylistic figures that appear in the *Atlamál* and other works of Old Norse literature derive from the heritage of continental Germanic poetry. Nevertheless, it cannot be determined beyond doubt whether the *Atlamál* written later than the *Song of the Nibelungs*, which was composed around 1200. The occurrence of similar poetic images in both texts does not presuppose a direct borrowing from the Middle High German source by the author of the *Atlamál*, but is best explained by the fact that these works refer to a common tradition. The similarities between the verses of the *Atlamál* (*hømlur slitnuðu*, *háir brotnuðu*) and the *Haraldskvæði* (*hømlur at brjóta en hái at slíta*), which to different narrative contexts, point to a deliberate literal imitation of one of the two poems by the author of the other.

On the basis of a comparative study of the vocabulary of the passages in question, Klaus von See attempts to determine the order in which the two Old Norse texts were written.

Klaus von See interprets stanza 37 of the *Atlamál* in the light of the tragic fate of Gunnarr and Høgni: according to this interpretation, the crew knowingly destroys their ship in order to destroy any possibility of return. Hagen performs this gesture in the *Song of the Nibelungs*. Conversely, the context of *Haraldskvæði* does not allow us to attribute the same intentions to King Haraldr's warriors, who are rowing to victory. If one follows this opinion, the expressions *hømlur at slíta* and *en hái at brjóta* do not seem to correspond with the rest of the poem. Consequently, Klaus von See regards this passage as an added apocrypha inspired by later Eddic poetry⁽¹⁴³⁾.

143 Klaus von See also rejects the thesis formulated by Felix Genzmer (1926, p. 124). According to Genzmer, the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi wrote not only the *Haraldskvæði*, but also the *Atlakviða*. He took the scene with the breaking of the oars from continental literary models, after which he wrote *Atlakviða*, and introduced it into *Haraldskvæði*. However, he no longer this motif in *Atlakviða* in order to avoid repetition.

Unfortunately, the arguments on which he bases this from the wording of the *Atlamál*: In stanza 37 of the poem, there is no mention of Gunnarr and Högni deliberately damaging the ship; the damage is simply caused by the force with which the furious warriors put their oars to it: *beysto bacföllum, brugðuz heldr reiðir*.¹⁴⁴

According to stanza 1564 of the *Song of the Nibelungs*, Hagen has the same experience when the oars break in his hands. At the end of the river crossing, Gunter's henchman destroys the ship to make any escape impossible, but this only happens later in the poem (stanza 1581).

In fact, the scene of the "broken cleats" finds its place both in the context of *Haraldskvæði* (namely in the "Raven Fragment") and in the context of *Atla- mál*; in both texts it corresponds to the description of the same martial virtues: Possessed by a fierce lust for battle, King Harald's men, just like Gunnarr's companions, throw themselves battle with such violence¹⁴⁵ that they can no longer take the condition of their ships into consideration. Accordingly, it is not at all necessary to assume a borrowing from the *At- lamál* in order to explain this passage of *Haraldskvæði*. On the other hand, it seems much more likely that the author of the Eddic poem borrowed the phrases *hømlur slitnuðu* and *háir brotnuðu* from the old Skaldic repertoire.

the. At a later date the author of the *Atlamál*, who is said to have been a good connoisseur of Jörn hornklofi's work, incorporated the image of the "broken cleats" anew into the context of the epic cycle about *Atli*. The hypothesis developed by Genzmer is based on very controversial assumptions and is therefore not convincing. The fragments that make up the *Haraldskvæði* do show stylistic similarities with the text of the *Atlakviða*. These works are probably contemporary. However, there is no direct that the skald Þórbjörn was the author. The origin of *Atlakviða* remains unclear, as the continental epic sources from which this poem was probably inspired have not come down to us. Incidentally, this remark refers to most of the pieces that belong to the heroic songs of the older *Edda*.

144 It is added, however, that the crew leaves the ship without mooring it at the end of the crossing - which may be due to the warriors' haste as well as to their fate: *gerðot far festa, áðr þeir frá hyrfi*.

145 It is undoubtedly a topos with the description of an exaggerated fighting excitement. Such behavior is not unconnected with the *berserks- gangr*. Compare this destructive rage with the senseless frenzy attributed the twelve sons of Arngrímur (*Arngrímssynir*) - all animal warriors - in the *Heiðreks saga*: *Það var síðuenia þeirra, er þeir voru með sinum monnum einum, ef þeir fundu að berserksgangur for að, aðforu a land vpp og brutust við stóra steina eða skoga. Þat hafði þeim að voda orðid, að þeir höfdu drepid menn sína og hrodid skip sín, þa er berserksgangur kom að þeim* (*Heiðreks saga* [Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924], p. 94) ("When they were alone with their men, they used to go ashore and attack large stones or trees when they were overcome by berserker rage. This became their misfortune, that they had killed their own men and plundered their ships when the berserker rage attacked them").

toire in order to use this motif in connection with the story of Gunnarr and Högni. This scene is described in other words in the *Song of the Nibelungs*, which seems to confirm the originality of the Old Norse formulation.

In the context of the *Haraldskvæði*, however, the use of the terms *hamla* and *hár* in connection with warships capable of carrying several dozen men can be described as an archaism. The use of oarlocks to fasten the oars, which is documented in the early 4th century on the Nydam ship¹⁴⁶ and later still on the Kvalsund ship¹⁴⁷ from the late 7th century, can only be observed on smaller boats in the Viking Age.¹⁴⁸ On the larger ships, the oars are no longer attached to the oarlocks on the gunwale, but - as on the Greek and Roman ships - are guided through lateral openings called *háborur* ("oar holes") (cf. the ships of Oseberg and Gokstad, which date to the 9th century).¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the expression *hømlur brjóta en hár slíta* should in all likelihood not be taken literally in the context of the Skaldic poem: It is an old poetic idiom that describes rowing with excessive zeal in a figurative way. There is therefore no reason to question the authenticity of this passage, as Klaus von See would like to do.

The other similarities that the philologist found between the *Atlamál* and the *Haraldskvæði* do not provide any compelling arguments dispute the traditional dating of the "raven fragment".¹⁵⁰ On the contrary, the use of the expression *emjuðu úlfar* (*Atlamál*, Str. 24) confirms the influence that the skaldic poem exerted on the author of the *Atlamál*. In fact, this verse seems to have been directly inspired by the verse of the 'Hafsfjörð fragment', which mentions the beast warriors and whose authenticity has never been questioned: *emjuðu úlfheðnar*.

Furthermore, Klaus von See to the use of the expression *málmr húnlenzkr* ("Hunnish metal", *Haraldskvæði*, Str. 16) in the second half of the *Haraldskvæði*, which refers to the tradition of the continental Germanic Hel-

146 Jankuhn 1987.

147 The ship from Kvalsund is 18 m long and was rowed by 20 men. See Shetelig / Johannessen 1929; Christensen 2001.

148 Cf. Crumlin-Pedersen 1997, pp. 125-130.

149 Cf. Falk 1912, p. 71; Durand 1996, pp. 26 and 35. Judith Jesch 2001, p. 155 translates *hár* as *oarport*, "rowing gate". On the terms *hár* and *hamla*, cf. inter alia Falk 1912, p. 70 f.; Kuhn 1991, p. 70; Jesch 2001, p. 156 f. (J. Jesch points out that *hamla* in medieval times also referred to a unit within the Leidangsordnung).

150 These are not least the phrase *drýgja heimsku* (*Haraldskvæði*, Str. 23 and *Atlamál*, Str. 86) and the word *man*, which is used both in the *Atlamál*, Str. 70, and in the *Haraldskvæði*, Str. 16, in the meaning of "servant", "slave".

The adjective *húnlenzkr*, which also occurs in the *Hamðismál*, refers to the name of the Huns (*Húnar*), which is mentioned several times in Old Norse poetry - especially in the Eddic *Atli* cycle, for example in the *Atlakviða*. Both the *Atlakviða* and the *Hamðismál* belong to the older Eddalic poems, which were probably written at the end of the 9th century. Incidentally, some scholars have attributed the *Atlakviða* to the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi.¹⁵² The occurrence of the word *húnlenzkr* in a work attributed to this poet should therefore not come as a surprise and should not be interpreted as evidence of a later interpolation, as von See would like to believe.

Two other terms aroused Klaus von See's suspicions about the age of *Haraldskvæði*: *austrænn* ("eastern") in stanza 16 and *leikari* ("juggler, minstrel") in stanza 22.

Von See interprets the adjective *austrænn* as a reference to the Wendens, who were at home on the coast of the Baltic and - according to the German philologist - only "entered the circle of vision of the Norwegians" from the 10th century onwards.

On the basis of this assumption, however, there is no compelling reason to exclude the presence of a group of female slaves (cf. the noun n. *man*, to which the attribute *austrænt* refers) from this region: King Haraldr could undoubtedly have supplied himself with this resource by other means than plundering or directly colonizing the regions in question.¹⁵³ Finally, what about the use of the noun *leikari*? Apart from this first mention, the term does not appear in skaldic poetry before the 12th century. Is its occurrence in the context of *Haraldskvæði* therefore an anachronism? Considering the small number of works from the 9th century that come down to us, it always seems dangerous for methodological reasons to evaluate an isolated example as a later, inauthentic addition and to exclude it from the "Urtext". Even if the fundamental possibility of such an interpolation for the last two stanzas of the "Rabenfragment" is taken into account, this does not allow

151 The rare name *Holmrygir*, which appears in stanza 14 of *Haraldskvæði*, is probably also taken from the realm of heroic legend (cf. the Ulmerugi of Jordan or the Holm-Ryge from the *Widsith*), as Klaus von See emphasizes. However, this name appears in one of the two stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*, whose affiliation to the poem is the most controversial.

152 Cf. Genzmer 1926.

153 It should be noted that West Norse sailors had already reached the Baltic coast in the course of the

9th century, as attested by the account of Wulfstan in the Old English version by Orosius (Lebecq 1987). The ethnic origin of Wulfstan is unclear. His name is possibly the anglicized form of a Scandinavian name (cf. Mossé 1950, 2, p. 373, note 107; the Old English texts of the voyages of Wulfstan and Ohthere appear in vol. 1 of this work, pp. 223-230). An annotated version of the two voyages can be found in Lund 1984. On Wulfstan's voyage, see also Englert / Trakadas 2009.

Nevertheless, this hypothesis does not into question the traditional dating of the entire second half of this poem.

Despite Klaus von See's hypercritical remarks, stanzas 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði* should be regarded as admissible evidence that is contemporary to the facts described.

An examination of the manuscript sources of *Haraldskvæði* leads us to the following conclusions: The poem consists of two independent poetic fragments, written towards the end of the 9th century, which tell us in a complementary way about the existence of animal warriors in the Norse of that time. The attribution of these fragments to this or that skald remains problematic. In any case, this question has little relevance for the interpretation of the stanzas, the dating of which in turn proves to be decisive in the context of the discussion about the origin of the berserker tradition.

According to the "Raven Fragment", the terms *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar* refer to the same group of warriors and not to two different categories, as the ambiguous "Hafsfjord Fragment" might suggest.

They are apparently elite warriors who belong to King Harald's inner circle.

In addition to the *Haraldskvæði*, the term *berserkr* appears several times in Eddic and Skaldic poetry - mostly in works after the Viking Age.

In the context of this study, these sources have only limited historiographical value. They will therefore only be presented briefly, without dwelling further on textual criticism.

D Other Eddic and Skaldic sources

In addition to the *Haraldskvæði*, Finnur Jónsson has listed seven references to poem fragments containing the appellative *berserkr* in his edition of the *Lexicon poeticum*⁽¹⁵⁴⁾:

- Verse 24 of *Hyndluljóð*
- Verse 37 of the *Hárbarðljóð*
- a verse of the *Qrvar-Odds saga*¹⁵⁵
- a verse of the *Gríms saga loðinkinna*¹⁵⁶
- a verse of the *Grettis saga*¹⁵⁷

154 Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 45.

155 *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892), p. 52; cf. also *Qrv.* III-2 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 290, B:2, p. 311).

156 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 155; cf. also *Skj.* A:2, P. 288, B:2, P. 309.

157 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 252 (cf. also *Skj.* A:2, p. 443, B:2, p. 474).

- Verse 18 of the *Íslendingadrápa*¹⁵⁸
- a stanza attributed *Víga-Styrr*¹⁵⁹ in the *Eyrbyggja saga*¹⁶⁰.

To this list can be added three stanzas from *Qrvar-Odds saga*, one of which also appears in *Heiðreks saga*⁽¹⁶¹⁾.

1 Content of the verses

The Eddic sources and the stanzas of the *Qrvar-Odds saga*

Two of the verses quoted by Finnur Jónsson are part of Eddic poetry: *Hyndluljóð* and *Hárbarðljóð*.

Verse 24 of *Hyndluljóð* refers to the sons of Arngrímur (*Arngrímssynir*), who are described in the Old Norse tradition as terrible beast warriors.

The motif appears again in the *Qrvar-Odds saga*, in which the twelve *Arngrímssynir* are slain by Oddr on the island of Sámsey. Three stanzas refer to this heroic deed; two are recited before the battle - one by Hjálmar, Oddr's brother-in-law, the other by Oddr himself;¹⁶² the third stanza is at the end of the saga and belongs to the *Ævidrápa*, which Oddr writes shortly before his death.⁽¹⁶³⁾ The word *berserkir* appears in a fourth stanza of the *Qrvar-Odds saga*, which, however, does not belong to the *Arngrímssynir*: During a battle of words¹⁶⁴ between Oddr and the warriors Sigurðr and Sjólfur, the latter boasts of having defeated a group of beast warriors.¹⁶⁵

158 *Skj.* A:1, P. 558, B:1, P. 543.

159 *Skj.* A:1, P. 116, B:1, P. 111.

160 Einar Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 75.

161 *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892), p. 54; cf. also *Qrv.* III-6 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 291, B:2, p. 312); *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892), p. 80; cf. also *Qrv.* VII-9 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 299, B:2, p. 318); *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829), p. 314; cf. also *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1888), p. 204; *Qrv.* IX-48 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 314, B:2, p. 334). The first of these three stanzas also appears in *Heiðreks saga* (Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 98; Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 423).

162 *Qrv.* III-2 and *Qrv.* III-6, latter being Oddr's response to a verse by Hjálmar, which also occurs in the *Heiðreks saga* (cf. *Qrv.* III-5, *Skj.* A:2, p. 291, B:2, p. 312) and of different variants have survived in the manuscripts, in which either the word *berserkir* or the readings *föstbrépr* and *fullhugar* appear; cf. *FSN* 1, p. 423; *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1888), p. 99.

163 *Qrv.* IX-48 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 314, B:2, p. 334).

164 On the traditional game of *mannjafnaðr* ("comparison of men"), which is often documented in Old Norse literature, see, e.g., de Vries 1970, 1, p. 505. The author describes *mannjafnaðr* in connection with ritual practices during *jól* festivities. The practice of these word fights is of course not limited to a religious context.

165 *Qrv.* VII-9 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 299, B:2, p. 318).

In one of the stanzas that Oddr recites before the battle on the island of Sámsey, the *Arngrímssynir* are described as "howling" (*grenjande*) warriors¹⁶⁶ - a stereotypical expression taken from the tradition of the "Hafrsfjord fragment", which is associated with the description of the behavior of berserkers in Old Norse literature.

For its part, stanza 37 of *Hárbarðljóð* belongs in a purely mythological context: the strange expression *brúður berserkja* ("berserker brides"), which put into the mouth of the god Þórr here, is probably a poetic metaphor for the giantesses.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

When Harbard/Óðinn accuses the hammer god of not being ashamed to women, replies that these creatures are not women, but "she-wolves" (*vargynior*) (Str. 39), who had destroyed his boat and threatened him with an iron club (an. *jarnlurkr*). The other heroic deeds that Þórr claims for himself in *Hárbarðljóð* explicitly concern giants.

The skaldic verses

The other poems mentioned by Finnur Jónsson, in which berserkers are mentioned, have little relevance for the investigation of the historical development of the tradition of animal warriors.

In contrast to the beast warriors described in the *Haraldskvæði*, the groups of twelve berserkers fought by Grímr loðinkinna or Grettir, as well as the berserker slain by the skald Þórleifr mentioned in the *dingadrápa*,¹⁶⁸ have little historical relevance.

The episode of the two berserkers defeated by Víga-Styrr in the *Eyrbyggja saga* seems to be based on a more trustworthy tradition.¹⁶⁹ Although the verse written by Styrr for this occasion does not contain more detailed information about the beast warriors, the text of the *Eyrbyggja saga* does contain more information about the origin and status of the two berserkers: They are two brothers, Halli and Leiknir, who belonged to the retinue of the Swedish king Eiríkr inn sigrsæli before entering the service of the Ladejarl Hákon Sigurðarson, who gave them as a gift to his Icelandic henchman Vermundr - which is seen as a clear humiliation by the two beast warriors. In the end, Vermundr offers the berserkers to his brother Styrr, who disposes of them after Halli sets his eyes on Ásdis, Styrr's daughter.¹⁷⁰

166 Cf. *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892), p. 53 and *Heiðreks saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829), p. 422.

167 Cf. the note by Andreas Heusler in Genzmer (transl.) 1932, p. 68.

168 For the episode of the murder of the berserker Klaufi, see *Svarfdæla saga*, ch. XVIII.

169 Cf. Niedner 1920, p. 69 f.

170 *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), pp. 61-64 and 70-75.

2 Dating of the verses

Are the verses attributed to Víga-Styrr authentic? There are no compelling arguments against a possible origin of this verse at the end of the 10th century, as suggested by Klaus von See⁽¹⁷¹⁾.

Admittedly, a certain amount of caution is required, as the *Eyrbyggja saga*, which contains this , in all likelihood dates to the middle of the 13th century.¹⁷² Nevertheless, the episode to in Víga-Styrr's stanza can be given a certain amount of credibility: The local Icelandic topography itself has preserved the memory of this event. There is no that this is a fictional story with no basis tradition.

The skaldic stanzas, which in turn survived in the *Qrvar-Odds saga*,¹⁷³ the *Gríms saga loðinkinna*¹⁷⁴ and the *Grettis saga*¹⁷⁵, are obviously younger. They appear in works towards the end of the 13th century or at the beginning of the 14th century and their content is based purely on saga traditions⁽¹⁷⁶⁾.

Philologists disagree on the dating of the *Íslendingadrápa*, which is attributed to the skald Haukr Valdísarson. However, it can be proven with reasonable certainty that this work not have been written earlier than the 12th century.¹⁷⁷ The same probably applies to the *Hyndluljóð*.¹⁷⁸

The dating of the *Hárbarðljóð* is equally controversial: several scholars support the thesis of an early origin in the 10th century;¹⁷⁹ others, such as Klaus von See, for a later dating to the 12th century.¹⁸⁰ This complex question will not be addressed in detail in the present study. Incidentally, the use of the word *berserkr* in the Eddic

171 Cf. von See 1961b, p. 130. von See emphasizes the use of two skaldic metaphors in this stanza, the use of which is not documented in Old Norse poetry before the 13th century. This argument is not entirely convincing, as many skaldic poems have been lost; moreover, the reuse of old and formulations in more recent poems is not uncommon.

172 Cf. McCreesh 1993; Perkins 1994.

173 Cf. Kroesen 1993; van Nahl 2001.

174 Cf. Jorgensen 1993.

175 Cf. Cook 1993; Beck 1999.

176 Some stanzas may be older than the prose text in which they are embedded. This seems to be the case for some stanzas of the *Qrvar-Odds saga*, which were written towards the end of the 12th century (cf. Heusler / Ranisch (eds.) 1903, pp. XLIV and XLVII). Nevertheless, these are definitely fragments that were written after the Viking Age.

177 Cf. Bjarni Einarsson 1993 c.

178 Cf. Gurevitch 1993; Zernack 2000.

179 Cf. Bax / Padmos 1993, p. 268 f.

180 Cf. von See 1961b, p. 130 f.

poem to a metaphorical expression that refers to a purely mythological context.

With the exception of *Haraldskvæði*, the entire corpus of Old Norse poetry thus provides only limited information about the tradition of animal warriors. The hypercritical conclusions drawn by Klaus von See from a late dating of all the different Eddic and skaldic works in which the word *berserkr* occurs are nevertheless not convincing: the term *berserkr* is not an "invention" of the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi, which was used again in skaldic poetry from the beginning of the 12th century. It is an old generic name that probably originated before the Viking Age.

The "Hafrsfjord Fragment" and the "Raven Fragment" are primary sources for the study of the tradition of the Old Norse animal warriors, the transmission of which was adopted in later Icelandic prose literature and - based on other sources, most of which are now lost - supplemented.

Chapter IV

The berserkers in Norway at the time of the Battle of Hafrsfjord: the tradition of *Íslendingasögur*

In addition to the three main works from the *Konungasögur* corpus, which are explicitly based on the skaldic verse tradition in their description of the participation of animal warriors in the Battle of Hafrsfjord (namely the *Fagrskinna*, the *Heim- skringla* and the *Flateyjarbók*), other sources provide supplementary accounts of these events. These are three sagas that belong to *Íslendingasögur* genre: *Vatnsdæla saga*,¹*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*² and *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*.³

All these texts contain a brief description of the battle and mention the decisive intervention of the berserkers, who depicted as the elite among King Haraldr hárfagri's companions. In this respect, the *Íslendingasögur* also seem to be influenced by the information from the skaldic stanzas, but without quoting them.

A The *Vatnsdæla saga* (Chapter IX)

This text confirms the presence of berserkers at the side of the Norwegian ruler. The battle of Hafrsfjord is described here in the following words:

Þenna bardaga átti Haraldr konungr mestan; þá var með honum Rognvaldr af Mæri ok margir aðrir stórir höfðingjar ok þeir berserkir, er Úlfheðnar vǫru kallaðir; þeir höfðu vargstakka fyrir

1 A parchment fragment of this work from the end of the 13th century survived, which dates to the beginning of the 15th century, as well as several paper manuscripts (cf. Vés- teinn Ólason 1993).

2 The oldest surviving manuscripts of the *Grettis saga* date back to the 15th century. The work was probably written at the beginning of the 14th century (cf. Cook 1993; see also the edition of the *Grettis saga* by Örnólfur Thorsson / Mördur Árnason (ed.) 1994, p. XXXVIII; Hubert Seelow (transl.) 1998, p. 251). This text is possibly based on an older version of the story of Grettir the Strong, which Árni Magnússon attributed to a nephew of Snorri Sturluson, Sturla Þórðarson (1214-1284). Sigurður Nordal 1938 agreed with this opinion.

3 The oldest surviving manuscripts of this saga, such as the *Mǫðruvallabók* (*AM 132 fol*), date to the 14th century (cf. Bjarni Einarsson 1993a). Several philologists have attributed this work from the beginning of the 13th century to Snorri Sturluson (cf. Hallberg 1962). On the skald Egill and his story, see, among others, de Looze et al. (eds.) 2015.

brynjur ok vörðu framstafn á konungs skipinu, en konungr sjálf varði lyptinga með hinni mestu þryði ok karlmensku [. . .].⁴

(This was King Harald's greatest battle; with him were Rognvaldr of Møre and many other great leaders and their berserkers, who were called Úlfheðnar; they had wolfskins for breasts and stood at the stem of the king's ship, and the king himself defended the deck in the stern with the greatest bravery and manliness [. . .].)

According to the author of the saga, the berserkers stand at the bow of the king's ship (*framstafn á konungs skipinu*). This reference does not appear in the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*, but agrees with Snorri's account in the *Heimskringla*.⁵

In this respect, the Icelandic *sagnamenn* presumably rely on the Norwegian oral tradition. This creates a thoroughly realistic picture, as elite warriors are generally supposed to sit in the most exposed position next to their leader. Incidentally, the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi praised the king's trust in the berserkers: *áræðismönnum einum hygg ek þar undir felisk / skyli sá enn skilvísi* (*Haraldskvæði*, Str. 21; "Only the brave men - I know it - are trusted there by the wise king"). The author of the *Vatnsdæla saga* was certainly familiar with these verses. The phrase *berserkir, er úlfheðnar váru kallaðir* ("the animal warriors who were called wolf-furs") is clearly reminiscent of the famous dialog between the Valkyrie and the raven (*Úlfheðnar þeir heita*), just as the following sentence is obviously influenced by the prose text of *Fagrskinna*: *þeir höfðu vargstakka fyrir brynjur* ('they had wolf coats for breasts').⁶

The motif of the *vargstakkar* appears in other Old Norse sources, such as the legendary *Óláfs saga*: The eleven henchmen of Þórir hundr, to whom Old Norse tradition attributes a decisive role in the course of the Battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030,⁷ are clad in wolf pelts. In the *Fagrskinna*, the reference to the wearing of *vargstakkr* seems to have an etiological function: it provides a rational explanation for the connection between the terms *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*, which juxtaposed in the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*. The author of the *Vatnsdæla saga* has adopted this argument without quoting the skaldic stanzas.

4 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 24 f.

5 *Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. IX, p. 107 f.

6 The word *vargr*, which is integrated here into the compound *varg-stakkr* ("wolf's [fur] coat"), describes the wolf with traits of a vicious beast. The term also has a legal meaning, that of the criminal, the "outcast" who is "outside the law" (cf. Ja-coby 1974).

7 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 192: *Þórer hundr oc þæir xij. saman ero firir utan fylcingarnar oc lausir oc varo i vargskinzstakcum* ("Outside the battle lines were Thorir Hund and his eleven men, who were not integrated anywhere. They wore jackets made of wolfskin"). In the version of the *Óláfs saga* recorded in the *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson gives these warriors reindeer skins (*hreimbjálbi*, pp. 440 and 492). For this episode, see Chapter VIII below.

The phrase *fyrir brynjur* ("instead of brünnen", "in place of brünnen") recalls the protective effect of the *vargstakkar*.⁸ Do the berserkers have to without any kind of body armor? In the *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson uses the adjective *brynjulauss* ("brünnenlos") in connection the behavior of the "men Óðinns" who are seized by the *berserksgangr*.⁹ The *sagnamenn* of the 13th century, who were undoubtedly unable to understand the meaning of the etymon **(ursus)* in the construction of the compound *ber-serkr*, interpret this term from the adjective *berr* (*nudus*). They thus describe the animal warriors as warriors without armor.

Compared to the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*, the account of the *Vatnsdæla* saga provides little new information. This source confirms the most important evidence of the skaldic tradition about the battle of Hafrsfjord, which the author of the saga follows almost word for word.

In contrast to this tradition, however, is the image of the berserkers, which is partly characterized by Christian prejudices and which appears later in the work.

In chapters XXX and XXXVII, *berserksgangr* is described as a mental disorder:¹⁰ Þórir Ingimundarson complains that he cannot suppress the fits of rage that regularly seize him. On the advice of his brother Þorsteinn, who makes a supplication to Almighty God, Þórir is finally freed from this illness rescuing an abandoned child.¹¹ Implicitly, the abandonment of pagan customs is presented here as a prerequisite for salvation.

In chapter XXXIII, Jökull, brother of Þórir and Þorsteinn, is also described as a berserker by the clairvoyant Helga: [*. . .*] *þat er sannmælt til Jökuls, at engi berserkr [er] slíkr í öllum Norðlendingafjórðungi sem hann [. . .]*.¹² Surprisingly, the word *berserkr* takes on a positive ring in this context: according to his own father, even as a child Jökull possessed all the abilities that make a

8 However, the protection provided by these fur tunics should not overestimated: The invulnerability of berserkers is in all likelihood due first and foremost to the pain-numbing physical reaction by the state of frenzy (*berserksgangr*). According to the beliefs of the ancient North, some people possessed the ability to express their "second self" in animal form: In this respect, the wearing of furs represents a tangible indication of this change of state, which is linked to the unfolding of an unusual power. Christian historiography, which rejects this idea, sometimes links the invulnerability of animal warriors with the use of enchanted furs (cf. the furs by Sami sorcerers in the *Óláfs saga helga*).

9 *Ynglinga saga*, chap. VI, p. 17.

10 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), pp. 83 and 97 f.

11 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 98.

12 *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. XXXIII (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 89): "[. . .] this is truly said of Jökull, that no berserker in all the fjords of the Northland is like him [. . .]".

kappi), although he was not to become a dominated man (*eigi mikill skapdeildarmaðr*).¹³ According to a semantic development that is well documented in Icelandic literature, the terms *berserkr* and *kappi* are thus used as synonyms in this context.¹⁴ Incidentally, a judgment favorable to animal warriors from the mouth of Helga, who is probably associated with pagan beliefs,¹⁵ should not come as a surprise.

In chapter XLVI of the *Vatnsdæla saga*, two more berserkers appear. They are two brothers, both called Haukr.

This time, the behavior of these evil characters conforms in all respects to the literary conventions adopted in many Icelandic sagas: The two swashbucklers lead the lives of commercial duelists in order to appropriate the wives and estates of their unfortunate opponents. In the course of their outbursts of rage, they bite the edges of their shields, howl like dogs and spare neither fire nor iron.¹⁶ Furthermore, the name the two brothers bear (*Haukr*, "hawk") to the literary motif of the "unwanted guest under an animal name"¹⁷.

The unexpected intervention of Bishop Friðrekr, a missionary in North Iceland, sets¹⁸ In his study of the fences in ancient Iceland, François-Xavier Dillmann rightly out the apologetic, edifying character of this tale: ". . . il est manifeste que les deux frères, appelés l'un et l'autre (de manière fort peu réaliste) du nom de Haukr, . . . servent uniquement de faire-valoir au missionnaire, en sorte que cet épisode . . . possédasse un caractère essentiellement édifiant, même si, en dernière analyse, il s'inspire dans une large mesure de l'antique représentation de l'extase magico-guerrière propre aux champions du dieu Óðinn."¹⁹

Several episodes in the *Vatnsdæla saga* thus reflect a negative image of the beast warriors, which stands in sharp contrast to the traditions that the skalds of the

13 *Vatnsdæla saga*, chapter XIII.

14 Cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 191, who translates the words of the clairvoyant Helga as follows: ". . . and l'on dit à juste titre de *Jökull* qu'il n'est pas un champion tel que lui dans tous les cantons du nord du pays." Cf. also Güntert 1912, p. 23, note 31 and the comment by Walter Heinrich Vogt in his edition of the *Vatnsdæla saga* (1921, p. 25, note 1 f.). In the *Ívens saga*, chap. XII (Kölbing (ed.) 1898, p. 91), the word *champion*, which occurs in the French version of this tale (*Ivain*, v. 4454), is translated with the Old Norse *berserkr*.

15 *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. XXXIII: [*. . .*] *hon var [. . .] framsýn ok forspá ok margkunnig um flesta hluti* ("... she was . . . foresighted and knowledgeable about the future and magical in most things"). As the saga progresses, Helga her magical powers against *Jökull*.

16 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 124 f.

17 Cf. Breen 1999b, p. 36.

18 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 124 f. This episode also appears in other sources (*Þorvalds þáttur víðfjrla* and *Kristni saga*).

19 Dillmann 2006, p. 265.

9th century (it should be noted that the mission of the Saxon bishop Friðrekr to the Nordic island took place around 980)⁽²⁰⁾.

In the course of this study (see in particular Chapter VII), the figure of the berserker as a troublemaker and highwayman will be discussed in more detail. Such an image, which appears very frequently in the corpus of the Icelandic sagas, contradicts the heroic reputation accorded to the berserkers portrayed as elite warriors in the accounts of the Battle of Hafrsfjord.

B The *Grettis saga* (Chapter II)

The description of this battle in the *Grettis saga* is very close to the version given in the *Vatnsdæla saga*. However, the author of the *Grettis saga* to the presence of beast warriors in both opposing armies, as does Snorri Sturluson the *Heimskringla*. King Harald's berserkers rush to attack the ship of Þórir haklangr, who is also described as a "very powerful berserker":

Haraldr konungr lagði at skipi Þóris haklungs, því at Þórir var inn mesti berserkr ok fullhugi; var þar in harðasta orrosta af hvárumtveggjum. Þá hét konungr á berserki sína til framgöngu; váru kallaðir, en á þá bitu engi járn; en er þeir geystust fram, þá helzk ekki við.²¹

(King Harald laid his ship against the ship of Þórir haklangr, because Þórir was the greatest berserker and brave; there was a very hard fight between them. Then the king ordered his berserkers to attack; they were called Úlfhéðnar, and no iron bit them; and when they rushed forward, nothing could stop them).

In this text, the invulnerability of the *úlfhéðnar* through iron is explicitly mentioned, information that does not appear in the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði*. It is, however, a commonplace of Old Icelandic literature. In the various versions of the *Óláfs saga*, the accounts of Þórir hundr and his companions provide an exemplary representation of this motif.²²

In the further course of the *Grettis saga*, there are several more references to raiders. They are clearly robbers (*ránsmenn*) and evil-doers (*illvirkjar*) who threaten defenceless hosts during the Yule season and are slain by the eponymous hero of the saga: Grettir first defeats a group of twelve berserkers from Halogaland (ch. XIX),²³ before killing the berserker Snækoll, leader of a band of *markamenn* ('forest-goers, brigands') (ch. XL).²⁴ In

²⁰ Foote 1993, p. 107.

²¹ *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 5.

²² Cf. among others *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 492.

²³ *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), pp. 62-71.

²⁴ *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 135 ff.

In this context, a law by Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson is mentioned that forbids duels and bans animal warriors:

Þótti monnum þat mikill ósiðr í landinu, at úthlaupsmenn eða berserkir skoruðu á hólmi gǫfga menn til fjár eða kvenna [. . .] ok því tók Eiríkr jarl af allar hólmgöngur í Noregi; hann gerði ok útlaga alla ránsmenn og berserki, þá sem með óspekðir fóru.²⁵

(It seemed to the men an evil custom in the country that robbers or berserkers challenged respected men for money or women to the Holm [. . .] and therefore Jarl Eiríkr abolished all Holmgang in Norway; he also declared all robbers and berserkers to be outlaws who acted violently).

This decision by Jarl Eiríkr must be dated to the first years of the 11th century - more than a century after the reign of King Harald Schönhaar.

C The *Egils saga* (Chapter IX)

Just as in the *Grettis saga*, the invulnerability of the berserkers who take part in the battle of Hafrsfjord is mentioned in the *Egils saga*: *er eigi bitu járn, en þat váru berserkir*. Together with other high-ranking figures belonging to King Haraldr's entourage (*hirð*) and the crew of his ship, the beast warriors stand at the most exposed position - next to the stem (*í sǫxum*) - at the ruler's side:

[. . .] hann hafði sjálf skip mikil ok skipat hirð sinni; þar var í stafni Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson ok Bárðr hvíti ok synir Berðlu-Kára, Qlvir hnúfa ok Eyvindr lambi, en berserkir konungs tólf váru í sǫxum.⁽²⁶⁾

([. . .] he himself had placed a large ship and his followers; on the were Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson and Bárðr and the sons of Berðlu-Kári, Qlvir hnúfa and Eyvindr lambi, and the king's twelve berserkers were beside the stem).

When the battle breaks out, the Berserkers stand out for their steadfastness:

Þórólf var sárr mjök, en Bárðr meir, ok engi var ósárr á konungsskipinu fyrir framan siglu, nema þeir, er eigi bitu járn, en þat váru berserkir.²⁷

25 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 61.

26 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 22. If *stafn* refers to the stem, the term *sǫxum* refers to the area behind it (cf. Baetke 1976, p. 521: "the part of the ship's board that rises to the stem"). According to Hjalmar Falk (1912, p. 84), this term is synonymous with *rausn*, which Dillmann (2000a, p. 443, note 4) translates as "demi-tillac d'avant", i.e. "forward half deck". In chapter IX of *Harald's saga hárfagra*, Snorri makes it clear that the berserkers are in this area of the royal ship.

27 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 23.

(Þórólf was badly wounded, but Bárðr even more so, and before the sail on the kingship there was no one without a wound except those whom the iron did not bite, and these were the berserkers).

Although the use of the Old Norse term *hirð*, which is not attested in the North before the 11th century, in the context of a narrative referring to the age of Haraldr hárfagris is an anachronism,²⁸ the early emergence of a Norse form of *comitatus*, which precedes the first mentions of the word *hirð*, can hardly be doubted.²⁹ The affiliation of the animal warriors to the royal retinue in pre-Christian Norway is not only postulated by the author of *Egils saga*, but also corresponds to the tradition handed down by the contemporary skaldic verses (see above chapter III).

In the text of *Egils saga*, however, another detail attention, namely that the berserkers in the service of King Haraldr form a group of twelve warriors (*berserkir konungs tólf*). The motif of the twelve companions, which is widely used in Old Norse literature, is very often associated with animal warriors - such as Þórir hundr and his fur-clad comrades in the story of St. Olaf. The number twelve may have a symbolic meaning, which could be linked to the ancestor of the god Óðinn.³⁰ Following this brief presentation of the accounts of the Battle of Hafrsfjord taken from three Old Icelandic sagas, further sections of *Egils saga* will be examined in more detail, as they provide a wealth of valuable information on the phenomenon of animal warriors.

D The social status of the animal warriors

The *Egils saga* mentions several high-ranking followers of Haraldr alongside the twelve berserkers who defend the king's ship during the Battle of Hafrsfjord. These include Þórólf, son of Kveld-Úlf, and the two sons of Berðlu-Kári: Qlvir Hnúfa and Eyvindr Lambi. Although Kveld-Úlf³¹ and Berðlu-Kári³² do not take part in the battle, these characters are of particular interest in the context of this study, as they presented as animal warriors in the first section of the *Egils saga*.

28 Cf. Kuhn 1956.

29 Cf. Lindow 1976; Steuer 1992; Wenskus 1992; Landolt / Steuer / Timpe 1998.

30 Cf. *Ynglinga saga* (ch. II) on the motif of the twelve chieftains around Óðinn (*hofðingjar* or *hof- goðar*, "priests") and the mention of the twelve Aesir in the *Gylfaginning* (ch. XX).

31 Literally: "evening wolf". In the course of this work (Chapter VI), the topic of the beliefs associated with this name will be taken up again.

32 The name means "Kári of Berðla" and refers to an estate that Kári owned on the west coast of Norway (today: Berle in Sogn and Fjordane, cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 447, note 5).

Kveld-Úlfr, grandfather of the skald Egill, is a Norwegian of noble descent.³³ In his adventurous youth he was by a *félag* ("cooperative")³⁴ to his compatriot Berðlu-Kári, with whom he undertook Viking expeditions: *en er hann var á unga aldri, lá hann í vikingu ok herjaði. Með honum var í félagsskap sá maðr, er kallaðr var Berðlu-Kári*⁽³⁵⁾ ("And as a young man he was on a Viking voyage and he was heering. With him was the man Berðlu-Kári.").

Berðlu-Kári is not only presented as a distinguished, bold man, but is also clearly described as a berserker: *[. . .] gofugr maðr ok hinn mesti af rekismaðr at afli ok áræði; hann var berserkr* ("[. . .] a distinguished man, quite superior in strength and courage; he was a berserker.").

Berðlu-Kári ends his Viking career, he retires to his farm on the west coast of Norway. He is described as a "very rich man" (*hann var maðr stórauðigr*). His daughter Salbjörg marries Kveld-Úlfr, who in turn returns to his family estate and, like his forefathers, becomes a wealthy and respected landowner:

Úlfr var maðr auðigr, bæði at lönðum ok lausum aurum; hann tók lends manns³⁶ rétt, svá sem haft hofðu langfeðgar hans, ok gerðisk maðr ríkr.³⁷

33 King Haraldr considers Kveld-Úlfr a "noble man of noble lineage": *gofugr maðr ok stórættaðr*; cf. *Egils saga* ch. V (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 12).

34 The neuter *félag* ("fellowship", "cooperative") denotes a form of community of goods that presupposes the pooling of money and goods for the purpose of a joint enterprise, especially in maritime ventures. The text of the *Egils saga*, in which the term *félagsskapr* appears, makes it clear that Kveld-Úlfr and Berðlu-Kári have a "common treasury": *Þeir Úlfr áttu einn sjóð báðir* (*Egils saga* [Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933], p. 3). As clear from this section of *Egils saga*, *félag* is not exclusively associated with a commercial activity, but also with Viking campaigns. The use of the word *félagi* ("comrade") in runic inscriptions confirms this observation (especially the inscription DR 1, stones from the parish of Haddeby. On this topic, see also Beck / Authén-Blom 1994 and Musset 1968). In the Norwegian legal text *Hirðskrá*, the term *félagi* (§ 33) also refers to a member of the *hirð* or 'royal retinue' (p. 425).

35 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 3.

36 The term *lendr maðr* refers to a "man who has received land (from the king)", i.e. a feudal lord of the king (cf. Krag 2001). It is uncertain whether this term was already in use in 9th-century Norway - at least in the sense in which it was later used. The first known reference to it is found in skaldic poetry of the 11th century. From the beginning of the

From the 12th century onwards, the institution of *lendir menn* lost its hereditary character and supplanted older, undoubtedly more independent forms of nobility (cf. Musset 1951, p. 98). The title *lendr maðr*, which is probably younger than the term *hersir* (cf. Würth 1999, p. 466 ff.), was replaced in 1277 by the title *barin*,

'baron' (cf. *IED*, p. 384). Whatever the origin and nature of the prerogative enjoyed by Kveld-Úlfr in *Egils saga* (incidentally, he is referred to as *hersir* in an improvised skaldic stanza by his son Grímr, cf. *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 70), he is above all concerned with his independence: he to answer the summons of the ruler of Firdafylki before he starts a conflict with the latter's opponent Haraldr hárfagri.

37 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 4.

(Úlfr was a wealthy man, both in land and chattels; he took over the rights to rule as his ancestors had done and became a powerful man).

With the end of his Viking voyages, on which proved his worth as a young warrior, Kveld-Úlfr's behavior changes to that of a great landowner who very prudent in the management of his estate: *svá he says, at Úlfr var búsyslumaðr mikill*. However, Úlfr retains his sinister character, which earns him the nickname "Evening Wolf":

En dag hvern, er at kveldi leið, þá gerðisk hann styggr, svá at fáir menn máttu orðum við hann koma; var hann kveldsvæfr. Þat var mál manna, at hann væri mjök hamrammr; hann var kal- laðr Kveld-Úlfr.³⁸

(But every day, as evening approached, he became sullen, so that few men could speak to him; he was tired of the evening. The men said that he was able to change shape; he was called Kveld-Úlfr).

Although the word *berserkr* does not appear in this section, the adjective *hamrammr* is undoubtedly an allusion to the tradition of animal warriors.³⁹ This is also proven by an episode described chapter XXVII of the *Egils saga*: The author uses the terms *hamrammr* and *berserksgangr* - which are obviously understood as corresponding expressions - to the frenzy that seizes Kveld-Úlfr and his son Grímr in battle against their enemies.⁴⁰

This source undoubtedly confirms the existence of animal warriors among the old Norwegian upper class. At this point, it coincides with Snorri Sturluson's account: Among the four berserkers reported in the *Heim- skringla* (Hildibrandr and Haki haðaberserkr in the *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, Berðlu-Kári and Þórir haklangr in the *Haralds saga hárfagra*), three are in fact presented as men of high rank (Haki, Berðlu-Kári and Þórir ha- klangr).⁴¹ It should be noted that these people lived at about the same time.

38 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 4.

39 Cleasby translates this adjective as "able to change one's shape" and the following clarification: "In the Sagas it is esp. used of berserker, - men gifted with supernatural strength or seized with fits of warlike fury (berserks-gangr)" (*IED*, p. 237). The relationship between *berserksgangr* and the adjective *hamrammr*, which is derived from the adjective *ramr* ("very") and the masculine *hamr* ("soul", "outer form of the soul", "form that is assumed after a transformation", cf. Strömbäck 1935, p. 173 and Dillmann 2006, p. 245, note 6) will be returned to later in the work.

40 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 69.

41 Snorri reports in connection with Haki haðaberserkr, whose epithet means 'animal warrior from Hadeland', that he owns much land in his region: *þar átti hann bú stór* (*Hálfðanar saga svarta*, p. 91; this passage is not included in *Codex Frisianus*. On this episode and the "odin" death of the berserker, who puts an end to his life by turning into his own

in the last two thirds of the 9th century. Only with Þórir hundr does a warrior appear again in the various versions of the *Óláfs saga* whose behavior resembles that of the beast warriors.⁴² In this case, too, it is a member of the upper class who bears the title of *lendr maðr*⁴³, just like Kveld-Úlfr in the *Egils saga*. In addition, Þórir hundr is one of the main figures of the pagan opposition directed against the Norse king in the first decades of the 11th century. Until the final introduction of Christianity in the Norse kingdoms, the position of the berserkers within the elite seems to be well documented.

One of the beast warriors mentioned in the *Egils saga*, however, is portrayed with negative character traits, unlike Kveld-Úlfr or Berðlu-Kári: They are Ljótr hinn bleiki. This unglamorous personage is a curse to the respectable families in the province of Møre.⁴⁴ He challenges his victims to a duel in order to claim their property, in accordance with the 'dueling laws' which, according to medieval sources, were in force at the time.⁴⁵ However, the historical existence of this warrior is not documented.

sword falls, cf. Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1990, p. 272 f.). Regarding Berðlu-Kári, Snorri reports that he "great beast warrior" (*berserkr mikill*) joins Jarl Rognvaldr "with a well-equipped longship" (*með langskip alskipat*), which clearly shows his social status (*Haralds saga hárfagra*, p. 113 f.). As for Þórir haklangr, who is also referred to as *berserkr mikill*, he is introduced by Snorri as the son of the king of Agder, Kjetvi (*Harald's saga hárfagra*, pp. 122 f.).

42 Snorri never uses the word *berserkr* in connection with Þórir hundr. Höfler (1940, pp. 52 f.), however, has emphasized his kinship with the animal warriors with good reason: facing opponents on the battlefield of Stiklastaðir, Þórir takes his place at the head of the army and is surrounded by twelve men clad skins that make them impervious to blows (cf. *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), pp. 482 and 492 f.).

43 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 218.

44 To. *Mærr* or *Mæri*. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, this name referred to a coastal region in western Norway, nestled between the headland of Stad (an. *Staðr*) and Namdal (an. *Naumudalr*). It consists of two parts, Sunnmøre and Nordmøre, which enclose Romsdal (an. *Raumsdalr*). The events described here take place in Sunnmøre (cf. *Egils saga*, chap. LXIV [Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 199]).

45 According to the *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 205), these "holmgang laws" (an. *hólmgöngulög*) actually allow the victor to claim possession of the vanquished. The term *hólmganga* refers to a duel that is governed by precise rules. The *Grettis saga* credits Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson with an edict banning duels and banishing berserkers.

There is every indication that this character is a stereotype: the name,⁴⁶ the Swedish origin attributed to him,⁴⁷ the effortlessness with which the skald Egill kills him and thus saves a noble young woman from an unhappy fate - all the topoi found in Icelandic literature are gathered here⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Another detail reinforces the artificial character of this scene: Egill, who is known never to have abandoned the religion of his ancestors,⁴⁹ accuses Ljótr of "sacrificing to the gods".⁵⁰ This statement, put into the mouth of a pagan who is familiar with pagan customs,⁵¹ creates an anachronistic impression.

The episode of the duel may be based on an authentic tradition;⁵² however, the description seems to be strongly influenced by the literary conventions that apply to this genre.

Incidentally, Ljótr's behavior does not contradict the thesis that certain berserkers belong to the upper social class: he has an armed entourage⁵³ and does not hesitate to challenge opponents of high rank.⁽⁵⁴⁾ However, the berserker's behavior does not contradict the thesis that certain berserkers belong to the upper social class.

46 The name Ljótr probably comes from the adjective *ljótr*, "ugly", "hideous". However, Janzén (1947, p. 43) has suggested a different interpretation of this first name and compares it with the Old High German *lioht*, "bright", "shining". The epithet *hinn bleki* ("the pale one") is probably a reference to the pallor that spreads across the face of the beast warrior during the frenzy: In the *Fljótsdæla saga* (p. 280), a corpse-like pallor spreads across Gunnsteinn's face at the moment (*Gunnsteinn var svo bleikur í andliti sem nár*) when he takes possession of him (as is also implied by the use of the verb *hamask*, which generally to the *berserksgangr*). The *Fljótsdæla saga* is a late source, dating from the end of the

15. century, but the passage quoted seems to correspond to a traditional picture.

chen. In addition, a character in the *Svarfdæla saga* (p. 134 f.) also bears the name Ljótr hinn bleiki. This is a Swede who is known for the fact that weapons cannot harm him - an ability that is often attributed to berserkers.

47 The berserkers Halli and Leiknir in the *Eyrbyggja saga* are also presented as two Swedish brothers (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 61 f.). In many Icelandic sagas, people who come from Sweden are described with negative traits.

48 On this topic, see above all Blaney 1982.

49 Egill expresses his faith in the god Óðinn above all in the poem *Sonatorrek*, which he wrote after the death of his son Þǫðvarr.

50 Cf. the expression *blóta bǫnd*, which Egill uses in one of the stanzas in connection with his opponent (*Egils saga* [Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933], p. 203).

51 Cf. the three episodes in chapters XLIV, LVI f. and LXXII of *Egils saga*. The last stanza of chapter LVI (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 163), which contains an invocation to Óðinn, is particularly noteworthy: *reið sé rǫgn ok Óðinn* ("may the gods and Óðinn become angry!"). On the curse ritual that Egill performs, cf. e.g. Dumézil 2000, pp. 343-368.

52 Even if the author of the saga was poorly informed about the place where the battle took place (cf. *Egils saga* [Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933], p. 199, note 2).

53 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 202: *Nú kom þar Ljótr með lið sitt*.

54 Above all Friðgeirr, a *lendr maðr*, on whose behalf Egill the battlefield.

The biographies of Kveld-Úlfr and Berðlu-Kári, whose existence is confirmed by several Old Norse historiographical sources, provide more reliable evidence of the status of animal warriors in pre-Christian Norway.

In addition to the indications of the social position of the berserkers, Kveld-Úlfr's genealogy also proves the hereditary character of the *berserksgangr*. Based on this genealogy, the existence of animal warrior families can be reconstructed.

E The hereditary nature of the phenomenon: a genealogy of animal warriors

In the first lines of his report, the author of the *Egils saga* lists Kveld-Úlfr's most important ancestors:

Úlfr hét maðr, sonr Bjálfa ok Hallberu, dóttur Úlfs ins; hon var systir Hallbjarnar hálftrólfs í Hrafnistu, föður Ketils hængs.⁵⁵

(Úlfr was the name of a man, the son of Bjálfi and Hallbera, the daughter of Úlfr inn óargi; she was the sister of Hallbjörn hálftröll from Hrafnista, the father of Ketill hængs).

The given names listed in this genealogy are particularly expressive: their etymology refers in each case to a name or aspect of an animal (with the exception of Ketill).⁵⁶ Bjálfi, father of Kveld-Úlfr, occurs in the *Landnámabók* with the name Brunda-Bjálfi. The masculine noun *bjálfi* (or *bjálbi*) describes a fur⁵⁷ or a garment made of this material (*pars pro toto*): Jan de Vries translates this term as "fur jacket",⁵⁸ Gunter Müller as "short skirt, jacket".⁵⁹ Müller associates *bjálfi* with the given name Heðinn, which comes from the appellative *heðinn*, "walking fur". The name thus denotes the "cloaked, masked one, the one in the fur robe".⁶⁰ The element *-bjálfi* often appears in composites of the type *geit-bjálfi*, *hrein-bjálfi*. In the story of the saint Óláfr, Snorri Sturluson tells how Þórir hundr has twelve *hrein-bjálbar* ("[shirts made of] reindeer hide"), hard as brünnen, made by Sami (*Finnar*) who are skilled in the art of magic.⁶¹ These strange garments still appear

⁵⁵ *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ketill hængr is one of Iceland's most important settlers, mentioned above all in the *Landnámabók*. The epithet *hængr* seems strange: *hæ(i)ngr* refers to the male salmon.

⁵⁷ *IED*, p. 65.

⁵⁸ According to de Vries 1962, p. 38, the Old Norse term *bjálfi* can be linked to the Russian *běljak* ("seal caught in winter"). He also shows that *bjálfi* in Faroese means "seal skin whose exterior is taken on by the souls of the dead".

⁵⁹ Müller 1970, p. 213.

⁶⁰ Müller 1970, p. 216.

⁶¹ Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, p. 440.

appears once in the legendary version of the *Óláfs saga*, in a variant that has already been mentioned here: According to this source, Þórircompanions do not wear reindeer skins, but "wolf [fur] coats" (*vargstakkar*). The relationship between the various sources suggests a connection between the first name *Bjálfi* and the animal warriors. Bjálfi's wife, Hallbera, also has a significant name, as does her brother Hallbjörn. Both given names contain the element *björn* ("bear")⁶² or its female equivalent, *bera*.⁶³ Hallbjörn also bears the epithet *hálfröll* ("half-troll"), which undoubtedly indicates an unusual physique - or else it refers to inappropriate behavior or a bad character.⁶⁴ In the Old Norse tradition, the *tröll* are also endowed with magical powers. In medieval literature, the term *troll/tröll* sometimes refers to wizards or sorcerers themselves, and the nouns *tröllskapr* and *trölldómr* (undoubtedly a late development) denote magic or sorcery. In the case of Hallbjörn, the epithet *hálfröll* possibly indicates that he has mastered magical practices⁶⁵ and at the same time emphasizes the physical characteristics of this person. The father of Hallbjörn and Hallbera, Úlfr inn, in turn bears the name of the wolf (*úlfr*), which is passed on to his grandson (Kveld-Úlfr). He is described in one of the manuscripts of the *Snorra Edda*⁶⁶ as a "great herder (*hersir ágætr*) in Norway, in the Naumudal"⁽⁶⁷⁾. The epithet *inn óargi* offers room for two possible interpretations.

62 Siblings bearing the name of the bear, whether or not they are associated with another name element, testify to a tradition that was well known in the ancient North. The most striking example is undoubtedly that of the twelve Norwegian brothers mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum*, VI, ii, 1-4): These fearsome warriors and plunderers, who undertake their raids from a fortified island, bear alliterative names containing the element *-biorn*. Seven of them have been handed down to posterity: Gerbiorn, Gunbiorn, Arinbiorn, Stenbiorn, Esbiorn, Thorbiorn and Biorn. The Icelandic sagas also give several examples of animal warriors with the name Björn - such as Björn inn blakki in the *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (pp. 4-6 and 5-11) or Björn járnhauss in the *Víga-Glúms saga* (Turville-Petre (ed.) 1960, pp. 10 f.). For further references, see Breen 1999a, p. 23.

63 Björn and Bera are also the names of the parents of the legendary hero Þoðvarr Bjarki (*Hrólfs saga kraka* [Slay (ed.) 1960], pp. 51-72). Björn, the victim of a curse, was transformed into a bear, while his son Þoðvarr had the ability to fight in the form of this animal (pp. 116-119).

64 In the Old Norse imagination, the *tröll* (or *troll*) is ascribed a monstrous size and unpleasant aspects (cf. Halvorsen 1974; Hartmann 1936). The skald Egill himself, whose size impressed his contemporaries, was described as *a mikill sem troll* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 178). On these questions, see Dillmann 2006, p. 170 f.

65 *IED*, p. 641 gives the term *troll* the secondary meaning "werewolf, one possessed by trolls or demons".

66 *Codex Upsaliensis (De la Gardie 11*, Uppsala University Library). This parchment is usually regarded as the oldest manuscript of the *Edda* (cf. Dillmann (transl.) 2005, p. 216).

67 Jón Sigurðsson / Finnur Jónsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (ed./trans.) 1880-1887, p. 268: *Vlfr hinn oargi var hesser agætr i noregi i navmo dali*.

In conjunction with the negation prefix *ú-* and the adjective *argr* (an opprobrious term for the feminine behavior of a homosexual or coward), the expression *inn óargi* could mean "the masculine" or "the brave".⁶⁸ Another thesis is proposed by Cleasby and Vigfússon: *óargr* could be interpreted as a corrupt form of the compound *of-vargr*, the first element of which corresponds to the adverb *of* (Greek *ὐπέρ*, Latin *super*), and the second to the appellative *vargr* ("wolf", generally with the connotation of a "vicious and ferocious tie-res").⁶⁹ *Úlfr inn óargi* would thus be the "super-wolf". The genealogy of the animal warrior Kveld-Úlfr is thus completely under the sign of the bear or the wolf. The name of one of his sons, Skalla-Grímr (Grímr the Bald), father of the skald Egill, also seems to be part of this tradition. The first name Grímr is derived from the feminine appellative *gríma*, "mask", "hood", "cap". In Old English, *grīma* means "mask" or "helmet (which covers the face)" (cf. the helmet of Sutton Hoo), or also "spirit".⁷⁰ Grímr (or Grímnir) is also one of Óðinn's names (*Grímnismál*, Str. 46, 47 and 49).⁷¹ In the oldest Germanic Na-men tradition, **-grīma* is associated with the wearing of masks in a probably cultic context.⁷² This etymological element appears quite frequently, sometimes as *simplex* (Frank, bair., alam., langob. Grim, Grimo, adän., aschw. Grim, Grimi etc.) or also as a compound (Alfgrim, Isangrim,⁷³ Ásgrímr etc.), often in

68 Fritzner 1886-1896, 3, p. 744 translates the adjective *óargr* as "modig, uforfærdet".

69 *IED*, p. 658. The expression *óarga dýr* appears in the *Þiðreks saga* (Unger (ed.) 1853, p. 183, note 2), among others. In the manuscript *Holm perg fol 4* (Norwegian manuscript from the end of the 13th century) the reading *ovarga* occurs for *óarga*. On the symbolic value of the expression *óarga dýr*, see Beck 1972.

70 Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, 1, p. 489; see also Müller 1967, p. 205 ff. On the use of *grīma* in the meaning of spirit cf. the appearance of *Iárngrímr* in the *Njáls saga*.

71 See Falk 1924, p. 14.

72 Müller 1970, p. 219: "concealing mask, cult mask".

73 For this name, which literally means "iron mask" and can be interpreted as a reference to the color of wolf fur (cf. an. *iárnserkr*, "wolf", literally "iron shirt"), see Much 1920, p. 155 and Müller 1967, p. 205 f. The name Isengrim therefore conjures up the appearance of a wolf. Some authors contradict this theory (cf. Christmann 1950, p. 133 f.): The relationship between the idea of the appearance of a wolf and the first name Isengrim could not be older than the tradition of fairy tales from the 12th century, such as the *Roman de Renard* or the *Ysengrimus* of Nivard of Ghent. Gunter Müller raised a solid philological objection to this thesis in 1967: "Since **grīm*, **grīma* 'mask' not survived in either the Old or Middle Ages, the formation of the wolf names cannot be attributed to the animal fable poets of the Middle Ages, but goes back to much earlier times." (S. 206). In a similar context, Müller (1970, p. 219) also mentions the Old Norse first name *Iárngrímr*, which appears in the *Njáls saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1954, p. 346 f.): the ghostly being bearing this name is the herald of dark omens; it appears in dreams dressed in a goatskin (*i geittheðni*). For Müller, this text is proof of the connection between the *-grímr* part of the name and the tradition of wearing cultic masks.

Connection with the name of an animal (such as eagle, boar, bear or wolf: an. Árgímr, Frank. Eburgrím, an. Biarngrímr, Grímólfr etc.).⁷⁴The occurrence of the first name Grímr within a family that produced several animal warriors is therefore hardly surprising.⁷⁵In contrast to his brother Þórólfr, Grímr is the only one of Kveld-Úlfr's two sons who shows the usual characteristics of a berserker (chap. I):

Þórólfr [. . .] var líkr móðurfrændum sínum [. . .]. Grímr var svartr maðr ok ljótr, líkr feðr sínum, bæði yfirlits ok at skaplyndi [. . .].⁷⁶

(Þórólfr . . . resembled his mother's relatives [. . .] Grímr was a dark and ugly man, like his father, both in countenance and character [. . .])

The *Egils saga* associates this person with a kind of frenzy that occurs at the end of the day (ch. XL),⁷⁷ especially before battle (ch. XXVII).⁷⁸King Haraldr himself declares that Skalla-Grímr "was full of ferocity like a wolf" (*hann var fullr upp úlfúðar*).⁷⁹This genealogy examined here is not an isolated example in the Old Norse sources: Certain given names do indeed appear repeatedly in lineages associated with the beast-warrior tradition. This custom is a topos in old Scandinavian literature.⁸⁰The most frequently occurring parts of the name recall the wearing of skins (*-heðinn*), the ability to change one's appearance (*-hamr*), the wearing of zoomorphic masks

74 Müller 1970, p. 220.

75 Many berserkers in the Icelandic sagas bear this name (cf. Breen 1999a, p. 24). The element *-grímr* also appears in the *Heiðreks saga* in the genealogy of the twelve *Arngrímssynir*: the ancestors of these berserkers include above all the names Arngrímr, Hergrímr hálftröll and Eygrímr (Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, pp. 1 f. and 90-93). The warrior Grimno in Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta*, VII, ii, 12-13) should also be mentioned, whose extraordinary strength and his position as a duelist (*eximiarum virium athleta*) to a stereotypical description of the berserker that occurs in many Old Norse sources (on the subject of the dueling berserker).

76 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 5.

77 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 101 f. In this episode, Grímr is seized by a sudden fit of rage during a game of *knattleikur* (a ball game played with the help of a wooden bat, the *knatt-tré*). This seizure occurs at *kveldit eptir sólarfall* ("in the evening after sunset"). Grímr kills one of his son's companions with his own hand before turning his attention to him. The maid Þorgerðr brák intervenes and warns him: *Hamask þú nú, Skalla-Grímr, at syni þínum* ("You turn now, Skalla-Grímr, against your son"). The unfortunate woman defies the murderous madness of her master and meets her death during the ensuing chase. The use of the mediopassive *hamask* confirms that this is probably the kind of frenzy associated with *berserksgangr*.

78 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 68 f.

79 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, ch. XXV, p. 65.

80 On the naming traditions and genealogies associated with the Berserkers, see Breen 1997.

(-*grímr*) or are simply the name of the bear (*björn*) or the wolf (*úlfr*). The *Harðar saga* in particular provides a good example of such a family: the wiking Björn Blásíða counts Úlfheðinn,, Úlfr and Úlfhamr inn hamrammi among his ancestors.⁸¹In the case of the skald Egill's ancestors (Skalla- Grímr, Kveld-Úlfr, Bjálfi, Hallbera, Hallbjörn, Úlfr inn óargi), however, the genealogy presented in the saga is more than a simple literary stereotype: The existence of these people, their names and the kinship ties that unite them are confirmed in other sources, especially the *Landnámabók* and the *Snorra Edda*.

The *Egils saga* thus provides convincing evidence for the thesis of the heritability of the *berserksgangr*. It not only shows that there was a certain naming tradition, but also illustrates the connection between the practices of the animal warriors and certain physical prerequisites, as well as the great importance attached to the ideas of the gift of metamorphosis (which is understood here as a purely psychological phenomenon, as will become clear in the course of the work).

⁸¹ *Harðar saga* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991, p. 46). Cf. also *Hauk's þáttr hábrókar* (pp. 577-581).

Chapter V

Trance and the memory of werewolves in the *Egil's saga*

A The physical characteristics of the beast warriors

The trait common all berserkers is their frenzy, which amplifies their powers. In the *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, this phenomenon of trance is described in an impressive way.

During a night attack, carried out with overwhelming brutality, Kveld-Úlfr and his son Skalla-Grímr devastate the ship of their enemy Hallvarðr. They are seized by insurmountable rage:

[. . .] hann óð aptr til lyptingarinnar, ok svá er sagt, at þá hamaðiskt hann, ok fleiri váru þeir fõrunautar hans, er þá hõmuðuskt. Þeir drápu menn þá alla, er fyrir þeim urðu; slíkt sama gerði Skalla- Grímr, þar er hann gekk um skipit; létu þeir feðgar eigi, fyrr en hroðit var skipit.¹

([. . .] he ran aft to the stern, and it is said that he was transformed there, and many of his companions were also transformed there. They killed all the men they could get hold of; Skalla-Grímr did the same as he ran across the ship; father and son did not leave until the ship was cleared).

The use of the mediopassive *hamask* in this passage clearly shows the nature of the attackers: they fall into the kind of delusion peculiar to animal warriors. Johan Fritzner proposes two definitions for the verbal form *hamast* (*hamask*): "iføre sig en anden Skabnings ham" and "gaa Berserksgang".² Cleasby's dictionary gives the translation "to rage, to be taken by a fit of fury",³ but connects *hamask* with the adjectives *hamstoli*, *hamramr*. These terms describe a state of ecstatic frenzy as well as the ability to "change form". The verb *hamask* comes from the masculine noun *hamr*, "form", "sheath", "skin" (etymologically related to the masculine *hams*, "molt [of a snake]", "shell [of a fruit]",⁴ cf. the Germanic *hama(n), "shell, skin, outer form"⁵ and the Indo-European root **ḱem*, "to cover"⁶). In the Old Norse sources, the use of the word *hamr* usually refers to the idea of

1 *Egils saga*, ch. XXVII (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, pp. 68 f.).

2 Fritzner 1886-1896, I, p. 715, art. "hamast".

3 *IED*, P. 236.

4 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 208.

5 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 216.

6 Cf. Pokorny 1959/1969, p. 556 f.

The *hamr* thus refers to the physical appearance in which the soul manifests itself, especially during an animal transformation cf. the expression *skipta hǫmum* in connection with the transformation of Óðinn in the *Ynglinga saga*⁸⁾.

The vocabulary and beliefs that connect the *berserksgangr* with the gift of transformation (the compound forms *ham-stoli*, *ham-ramr*, *ham-hleypa*, the expression *eigi einhamr* etc.) will be examined later in order to determine to what extent the "metamorphoses" of the berserkers differ from the animal transformations described in the mythological sources, the legendary tradition or the accounts of magicians.

For the time being, only the significant verb *hamask* in the two episodes of *Egils saga*, which are connected with the evening tantrums of the beast warriors, should be mentioned: The word first appears in the description of the battle against *Hallvarðr* (ch. XXVII) and later in a scene in which Skalla-Grímr, blind with rage, turns on his own son (ch. XL). The phrase *mjök hamrammr*, which is used for Kveld-Úlfr at the beginning of the saga, naturally belongs in the same context.

Does the tradition of the *Egils saga* allow us to determine the trigger of the *berserksgangr*?

There is no mention of "archaic techniques of ecstasy" in this source, to take up a concept coined by Mircea Eliade.⁹ A shamanistic influence on the *berserksgangr*, as favored by some interpretations⁽¹⁰⁾ cannot be proven here.

The behavior of the animal warrior Ljótr hinn bleiki in chapter LXIV of the saga is reminiscent of a martial ritual designed to impress the opponent, rather than a technique intended to facilitate entry into a trance-like state. Incidentally, Ljótr's animalistic behavior is clearly described as a consequence of the *berserksgangr* and not as the trigger of the seizure: *þá kom á hann berserksgangr, tók hann þá at grenja illiliga ok beit í skjöld sinn*.¹¹

7 Cf. *IED*, p. 236 f.; Fritzner 1886-1896, 1, p. 718. Dillmann 2006, p. 245, note 26 suggests the following translation: "forme extérieure de l'âme", "apparance prise lors d'une métamorphose". On concepts of the soul in the Nordic world, see especially Strömbäck 1935 pp. 160-190, and Strömbäck 1975. For a more general study of ancient concepts of the soul, which takes into account mainly ancient Indian but also Scandinavian evidence, see Arbman 1926.

8 *Ynglinga saga*, p. 18.

9 Eliade 1968.

10 Cf. Buchholz 1968.

11 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 202.

The verb *grenja* ("to roar") is often used in Old Norse literature for the cries¹² emitted by animal warriors. It is reminiscent of the howling of dogs¹³ and wolves¹⁴.

The image of the berserker biting his shield corresponds to the stereotypical description of animal warriors. This tradition, which is reported in many Icelandic sagas¹⁵ seems to be confirmed in medieval Norwegian iconography: Among the walrus-leg chess pieces on the Scottish island of Lewis in the 19th century, several pawn figures do indeed show a striking resemblance to this phenomenon.¹⁶ Nevertheless, these figures date to the 12th century and therefore cannot have been inspired by a direct observation of berserkers.

So how can we interpret this strange custom attributed to the beast warriors, which consists of biting the edge of the shield with their teeth? Is this behavior triggered by some kind of epileptic seizure, as Fredrik Grøn suggests?¹⁷ Ljótr's behavior in the *Egils saga* is accompanied by roaring and terrifying screams. The Icelandic philologist Sigurður Nordal¹⁸ associates this behavior with the ancient Germanic tradition of *bar(d)itus*.¹⁹ In his *Germania* Tacitus describes the warriors holding their shields in front of their mouths to give their war cries more resonance:

12 Cf. Str. 8 of the *Haraldskvæði* or the *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), pp. 67 f. For further references, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, pp. 332 f. and Breen 1999a, pp. 66-69.

13 Cf. the expression *grenja sem hundr*, which is used in connection with the berserkers in the *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 124).

14 In the *Gylfaginning* we find the expression *hann grenjar illiliga*, which is used in connection with the wolf Fenrir (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 37).

15 Cf. *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 136: *Tók hann þá at grenja hátt ok beit í skjaldar-röndinda* [. . .]. For further references, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, p. 333 and Breen 1999a, pp. 69-72.

16 Four figures are biting into the edge of their shields. Three of them are kept in the British Museum (Iv. Cat. 123, 124, 125), the fourth in the National Museum of Scotland (H. NS 29). Cf. Stratford 1997; Roesdahl 1992, pp. 104 and 390 f.; Roesdahl 1998, p. 29 f.; Caldwell et al. 2009 and 2014.

17 Cf. Grøn 1929a, especially p. 48 f. Some characteristics attributed to the *berserksgangr* are indeed reminiscent of an epileptic seizure: the hammering of the teeth into the shield, the foam that forms in the corners of the mouth, the change in facial color, the apathy that follows the seizure (cf. the sources cited by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, p. 332 ff.). These elements refer to literary stereotypes: To describe the frenzy of berserkers, medieval authors drew inspiration from the effects of epilepsy or rabies (cf. Breen 1999a, p. 95 f.). However, the reputation as elite warriors attached to animal warriors can hardly be reconciled with an epileptic disease.

18 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 202, note 1.

19 This term is primarily known from Tacitus' *Germania*, various versions of which give both the reading *barditus* and the reading *baritus* (*Germania*, pp. 71 and 72, note 1). The word is also used by Ammianus Marcellinus and Flavius Vegetius Renatus (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, XVI, xii, 43 [Rolfé (ed./trans.) 1963/1964, 1, p. 286 ff.], XXI, xiii, 15 [2, p. 164],

Sunt illis haec quoque carmina, quorum relatu, quem barditus uocant, accendunt animos futuraeque pugnae fortunam ipso cantu augurentur [. . .]. Adfectatur praecipue asperitas soni et fractum murmur, obietis ad os scutis, quo plenior et grauior uox repercussu intumescat.²⁰

(They also have a kind of song, called barditus, which perform to encourage themselves and from the mere sound of which they deduce the outcome of the impending battle [. . .]. What matters most to them is the roughness of the sound and a dull roar: they hold the shields in front of their mouths; thus the voice rebounds and swells to greater force and fullness)⁽²¹⁾

In connection with the *barditus*, Sigurður Nordal also quotes stanza 156 of the *Hávamál*. At this point in the Eddic poem, Óðinn reveals one of the spells (an. *ljóð*) whose secret he knows:

Þat kann ec íþ ellipta,
ef ec scal til orrosto
leiða langvini: undir
randir ec gel, enn
þeir meþ ríki fara
heilir hildar til,
heilir hildi frá,
koma þeir heilir hvaðan.

I know an eleventh, if I am
to lead into battle
the old friends:
Under the shield I sing,
then they go into battle
with glory, safe and
sound,
they come safe from every place⁽²²⁾

Before he drags his "old friends" (*lang-vinir*) into battle with him, the god has the habit of "singing under his shield" (*gala undir randir*).

The power of this song allows his loyal companions to the battle unharmed (*heilir*). Óðinn is thus portrayed in the *Ynglinga saga* as the god of the berserkers:²³ When "his men" (*hans menn*) are seized by the *berserksgangr*, "bite [them] in their shields" (*bitu í sköldu sína*), "mad as dogs or wolves" (*galnir sem hundar eða vargar*), neither fire nor iron can hurt them (*en hvártki eldr né járn orti á þá*). The same source also emphasizes the terror that Óðinn experienced in the

XXXI, vii, 11 [3, p. 430 ff.]; Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *Epitoma rei militaris*, III, 18 [Selten (ed./trans.) 1990, p. 184 ff.].

20 *Germania*, III, p. 71 f.

21 Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 7.

22 Krause (transl.) 2004, p. 69.

23 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 17 f.

The berserker's ability to blunt the weapons of his opponents and to "change his shape" is widespread in the ranks of his enemies. These abilities are also attributed to some berserkers in the Icelandic sagas⁽²⁴⁾.

The motif of "singing under the shield" also appears in the Scandinavian iconography of the Vendel period. There is a similar motif on the helmet from the grave of Valsgärde VII (Uppland): two warriors raise their shields to their mouths, a gesture clearly reminiscent of the *barditus*.²⁵ These figures wear helmets adorned with bird heads.

This type of headgear, which was often depicted in Germanic art of this period (helmet of Valsgärde VIII, helmet of Sutton Hoo, belt buckle of Finglesham, etc.),²⁶ is found on one of the matrices of Torslunda: this plate shows a "weapon dancer" whose helmet is decorated with the heads of birds of prey. This 'dancer', interpreted by many scholars as Óðinn,²⁷ is also accompanied by an animal warrior dressed in wolf fur.²⁸ For the Viking Age, one of the tapestry fragments from the Oseberg grave possibly contributes another depiction of the 'song under the shield', and this in a context that is also reminiscent of animal warriors: the figure that appears in this depiction, dressed from head to toe in an animal pelt (wild boar?), raises its shield to its mouth.²⁹

As soon as he "bites" his shield, the berserker gives himself over to a kind of warlike, ritualized gesture. The main purpose of this gesture to frighten the opponent (either they actually bite the edge of the shield or the posture with the shield in front of the face to amplify the scream that is emitted at the beginning of the battle; if one follows the latter thesis, the war cries of the berserkers probably imitated the howling of wolves or the growling of bears, cf. the verbs *emja* and *grenja* used in stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði*).

24 On the ability blunt weapons, see the '*halfberserker*' (*halfberserkr*) Moldi in the *Svarfdæla saga* (p. 146). For further references, see Breen 1999a, p. 56. The sources on the berserkers also describe the phenomenon of transformation under the following three aspects: Disguise (associated with the wearing of animal furs), change of behavior (purely psychological phenomenon) or change of appearance ("real" metamorphosis). Depending on the type of report (historiographical or legendary), these three forms can be combined in different ways.

25 Cf. Lamm / Nordström (eds.) 1983, p. 78, fig. 3a.

26 For the helmet of Valsgärde VIII, see Arwidsson 1954; Lamm / Nordström (eds.) 1983, p. 78, fig. 3 c. The motif of the helmet of Sutton Hoo and that of the ring of Finglesham is illustrated in Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, p. 486, figs. 48 and 49.

27 Cf. Oxenstierna 1956, p. 150 and fig. 171; Beck 1968a, p. 239.

28 Cf. Bruce-Mitford 1968, plate XVI, motif IV.

29 Cf. Hougen 1940, p. 104. A fur-clad warrior with a figure wearing a horned helmet at his side can also be seen on another fragment (Hougen 1940, p. 115, fig. 9).

Apart from the episode with the warrior Ljótr hinn bleiki, the author of *Egils saga* ascribes three essential characteristics to the *berserksgangr*: the abruptness with which the phenomenon breaks out, the evening hour at which it occurs, and finally the apathetic state that follows the subsiding of the frenzy.

The entry into the frenzy is sudden: the *berserksgangr* is not preceded by a magical ritual. Neither Kveld-Úlfr nor his son Skalla-Grímr seem to be versed in magic - unlike the skald Egill, their direct descendant, who is adept in this art. However, the verb *hamask* or the adjective *hamrammr* are never actually used in connection with Egill: The latter does not possess the ability to fall into a trance, although he too is sometimes overcome by a certain wildness.³⁰

The hereditary nature of the frenzy within a family of beast warriors, as well as the lack of techniques to "enter the state", give the *berserksgangr* the appearance of being involuntarily triggered.

The tradition of the *Egils saga* seems to confirm this theory: In Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr, the phenomenon is indeed triggered by natural predispositions, which tradition classifies as hereditary.

In the Icelandic sagas, these predispositions are perceived either as a kind of illness (cf. Þórir Ingimundarson in the *Vatnsdæla saga*) or as an ability peculiar to elite warriors (cf. the definition of *berserksgangr* in the *Ynglinga saga*).

The two ideas can also be combined: At the side of his father Kveld-Úlfr, Skalla-Grímr behaves like a fearsome warrior, but in other circumstances turns on his own son in a fit of murderous madness.⁽³¹⁾

According to the *Egils saga*, the onset of the *berserksgangr* coincides with nightfall: The seizures of Egil's ancestors always occur suddenly in the evening. The end of the day is always a favorable period for mysterious or uncanny phenomena (appearance of revenants, preparation of sorcery, "death omens", etc.).³²In addition, the *Egils saga* describes very precisely the state of apathy that follows the *berserksgangr*:

Svá er sagt, at þeim mönnum væri farit, er hamrammir eru, eða þeim, er berserksgangr var á, at meðan þat var framit, þá váru þeir svá sterkir, at ekki hélzk við, en fyrst, er af var ge- ngit, þá váru þeir ómáttkari en at vanða. Kveld-Úlfr var ok svá, at þá er af honum gekk ham-

30 Reference should be made to the passage in which he fights Atli. In the course of the fight, Egill does not hesitate to tear open his opponent's neck with his teeth before breaking the back of the bull intended as a sacrifice with his bare hands (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, ch. LXV, S. 210).

31 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 101 f.

32 On the "death omens", see Dillmann 2006, p. 105, note 15 with a reference to the study by Boberg 1934.

remmin, þá kenndi hann mæði af sókn, er hann hafði veitt, ok var hann þá af öllu saman ómáttugr, svá at hann lagðisk í rekkju.³³

(It is said that the men who could transform, or those who were seized by berserkness, were such that they were so strong while they were in that state that nothing could stop them, and it was only when the state fell away that they were more feeble than normal. It was the same with Kveld-Úlfr, when the transformation fell from him, that he felt enfeebled by the battle they had waged, and he was so weak from it all that he lay down in bed).

Kveld-Úlfr dies in the days following this ultimate battle as his ship sets sail for Iceland. Is there a connection between the daze as the trigger for the *berserksgangr* and the weakness that the seizure? The Icelandic sources rarely mention the nocturnal character of the phenomenon⁽³⁴⁾ whereas they describe the motif of exhaustion much more often.³⁵

In the *Egils saga*, both phenomena are closely linked to Kveld-Úlfr's behavior: He sometimes appears sleepy and unfriendly at the end of the day, and his fits of rage are followed by extreme exhaustion.

It should be noted that the *berserksgangr* in the *Konungasögur* is never associated with a change in behavior triggered the onset of darkness. Is this a motif in the *Egils saga* that has been influenced by later ideas? The epithet Kveld-Úlfr, his nightly sleepiness, his wild character and the rumors about his ability to transform are reminiscent of werewolf ideas.³⁶ What is the connection between the practice of *berserksgangr* and the idea of animal transformation?

B *Berserksgangr* and werewolf traits

The nocturnal behavior attributed to Kveld-Úlfr is reminiscent of the well-known lore of werewolves, which has existed for centuries in European history.

³³ *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 70.

³⁴ Another example of the nocturnal triggering of the *berserksgangr* can be found in the episode of the tasks given to Halli and Leiknir in *Heiðarviga saga* (p. 222). The *Eyrbyggja saga* also tells this story, but without referring to the evening nature of the phenomenon. It should be noted that the fight between Dufþark and Stórólfr in the *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968, p. 355 f.), who fight each other in the guise of a bull and a bear respectively, also takes place after dusk. These people are not described as berserkers, but are *hamrammir* ("able to change form"). For further references to the nocturnal aspects of the *berserksgangr*, see Breen 1999a, p. 81 f.

³⁵ On the motif of exhaustion that follows frenzy, see, , the story of the death of the Berserker Halli and Leiknir in the *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), p. 74.

³⁶ Cf. Holtsmark 1968.

³⁷This impression is of course reinforced by the Norwegian's name (or epithet).

Úlfr hét maðr [. . .] hann var kallaðr Kveld-Úlfr.³⁸ The *Egils saga* does indeed suggest that the element *Kveld-* an epithet added to the name *Úlfr*. However, there are two Scandinavian patronymics that are related to the Old Norse *Kveld-Úlfr* and appear in medieval sources: *Eskillus Qualdolfsson* (Sweden, around 1334) and *Asolff Kvelhuffson* (Norway, 16th century).³⁹

In any case, the meaning of the Old Norse form *Kveld-Úlfr* seems to be unambiguous: The idea of the end of the day as a time when werewolves are particularly active is widespread.⁴⁰ Philologist Gunter Müller emphasizes that the Norwegian name *Náttólfr* ("night wolf") probably belongs in the same context. This first name in several documents from the 14th and 15th centuries, but is undoubtedly of much older origin: the element *Nátt-* (*Nótt-*), which only occurs very rarely in personal names, is only found in the Old Norse *Náttfari* (in Swedish runic inscriptions *Natfari*), "the one who comes out of the night"⁽⁴¹⁾.

In Müller's view, *Náttfari* is seen alongside "*Kveld-Úlfr* and *Náttólfr* as 'Wer-'
⁴²This tradition of naming refers to traditions that are well documented in the Germanic world - traditions according to which the elite warriors appear with the features of predatory animals ("animal warriors").⁴³ In these, the abilities of the best warriors merge with those of the most dangerous animals: bears, wolves, wild boars, birds of prey, etc. Many first names are therefore formed on the basis of names for wild animals. However, these are not just poetic metaphors based on the parallels between the fighting qualities of an animal warrior and the ferocity of a wild animal.

37 Cf. Leubuscher 1850; Hertz 1862; Schaefer 1905; Stewart 1909; Wikman 1931; Sahlgren 1934; Odstedt 1943; Otten 1986; Słupecki 1994; de Blécourt 2007.

38 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), pp. 3 and 4.

39 Müller 1970, p. 135.

40 Cf. Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, XVIII, 45. According to Höfler (1934, p. 22 f.) and Weiser-Aall (1927, p. 50), the memory of very old rituals echoes in the ideas and legends relating to the nocturnal machinations of werewolves: In many areas of northern and central Europe, the time of the winter solstice was the occasion for traditional disguises which included many animal figures. Similarly, the Icelandic sagas often place the attacks of the berserkers close to the *jól* festivities - the time of year when the nights are longest (see, for , the episode from the *Grettis saga*, ch. XIX [Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936], pp. 62-71).

41 Müller 1970, p. 135 f.

42 Müller 1970, p. 136.

43 Müller 1970, p. 178 f.

Some name elements explicitly refer to the wearing animal furs or masks (*Heðinn*, *Biðlfi*, *Grímr* etc.)⁽⁴⁴⁾.

The effect achieved by this disguise, which is intensified by various mimetic procedures (screams, howls, frightening posture), identifies a warrior with the animal whose behavior and appearance he adopts. Is this appearance, which expresses a change of personality, sufficient to create the impression of a physical transformation? In the Old Norse sources, animal warriors are very rarely credited with the ability to transform properly: they differ from other warriors above all in the ecstatic force of their fits of rage. Kveld-Úlfr is described as *mjök hamrammr* ("very capable of transformation") and he becomes sullen at nightfall (*ge- rðisk hann styggr*). However, nowhere in *Egils saga* is it mentioned that he takes on the appearance of an animal.

In the *Landnámabók*, two warriors in the shape of a bear and a bull face each other. They are Stórolfr and Dufþakr, for whom the term *hamramnir mjök* is also used. However, another source (*Orms þáttur Stó- rólfs sonar*, recorded in the *Flateyjarbók*) attributes magical powers to the same people: Stórolfr [. . .] var [. . .] *kallaðr fjölkunnigr* ("Stórolfr [. . .] was called fjölkunnigr [. . .]"). This last term denotes 'he who has much knowledge', that is, a 'magician'.⁴⁵ Dufþakr var [. . .] *mjök trylldr* ('Dufþakr was [. . .] well versed in magic').⁴⁶

As François-Xavier Dillmann has put it, the transformations are ". . . l'un des traits caractéristiques permettant de distinguer les magiciens authentiques des autres personnages qualifiés de hamramnir ou d'*eigi einhamir*'.⁴⁷ This statement is especially true in the sources that are attributed a certain historical realism, such as the *Konungasögur* or the *Íslendingasögur*. In the latter, the adjective *hamrammr* is usually associated with animal warriors, but there is no reference to an animal transformation.⁴⁸ In the prehistoric sagas (*Fornal- darsögur*) and courtly sagas (*Riddarasögur*)⁴⁹ several berserkers have the ability to transform themselves. The fairy-tale character inherent this literary genre is clearly evident in the nature and diversity of the

44 Müller 1970, § 173: "the masked man".

45 Þórhallur Vilmundarson (ed.) 1991, p. 398. On the composite *fjölkunnigr*, see Dillmann 2006, p. 195 f.

46 Þórhallur Vilmundarson (ed.) 1991, p. 401.

47 Dillmann 2006, p. 246.

48 *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), p. 74.

49 In Old Norse literature, the *riddarasögur* ("knightly sagas") correspond to the genre of courtly novels. This genre contains both original Scandinavian traditions and a large number of translations and adaptations based on French, English or German *lais* and *chansons de geste*; see Kalinke / Barnes 1993.

described transformations. The berserker called Grímr in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*⁵⁰ transforms himself successively into a dragon (*flugdreki*), a snake (*ormr*), a wild boar (*göltr*) and finally into a bull (*griðungr*). In *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, Fátr is also transformed into a lion.⁵¹ These figures therefore show no preference for the form of the bear or the wolf. However, some legendary heroes take on the appearance of these two animals, such as Sigmundr and Sinfjötli in the *Völsunga saga*⁵² or Bǫðvarr bjarki in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*.⁵³ However, the sources never use the term *berserksgangr* in connection with these figures (Bǫðvarr, however, is referred to as *ber-serkr* in the *Snorra Edda*).⁵⁴ The adventures attributed to Sinfjötli and Bǫðvarr are nevertheless reminiscent of the customs and beliefs associated with the animal warrior tradition.

According to the *Völsunga saga* (Chapter VIII), Sigmundr and Sinfjötli wander around for some time in the guise of wolves after covering themselves with their skins (the name Sinfjötli is, incidentally, a metaphor for the wolf).⁵⁵ Some scholars have seen the episode of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli's transformation in the context of the 'rites de passage'.⁵⁶ Following a theory by Otto Höfler,⁵⁷ the wild life that the two heroes lead during this period corresponds to an initiation that precedes the consecration of the young Sinfjötli to the god Óðinn. Lily Wei-ser-Aall draws a parallel between this initiation rite and the customs attributed to some Germanic warrior bands, to which she counts the berserkers of the Old Icelandic sources.⁵⁸

However, no Old Norse text explicitly refers to the animal warriors as members of a community on initiation. The existence of such associations in Scandinavian society in the Viking Age is not clearly documented. At the most extreme, it can be assumed that the applicant had to undergo tests before joining a group of elite warriors (the "laws" to the famous Vikings of Jomsburg possibly preserve the memory of such practices). It is also difficult to determine whether there is a religious dimension to this type of 'test', linked to the cult of a particular deity.

50 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 342.

51 *Viktors saga ok Blávus* (Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1964), p. 31 f.

52 Olsen (ed.) 1906/1908, p. 15 ff.; cf. also Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 130 f. In this work, *Sigmundr* and *Sinfjötli* are never referred to as *berserkir*.

53 Slay (ed.) 1960, pp. 116-119.

54 Snorri Sturluson does indeed count Bǫðvarr bjarki among King Haraldr's berserkers (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 140).

55 Much 1929; Schröder 1960.

56 For this concept, see van Gennep 1909.

57 Höfler 1934, pp. 188-219.

58 Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 70 f.

is. The *Völsunga saga*, which was probably written in the 13th century, does not provide any precise information on this point. However, it does pass down ancient mythical themes and legends that show an undeniable connection to the tradition of the beast warriors. The reception to Sigmundr and Sinfjötli in Valhalla⁵⁹ is indeed reminiscent of the connection between the berserkers and the consecrating deity Óðinn (cf. chapter VI of the *Ynglinga saga*).

Nevertheless, the transformation of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli cannot be completely by the *berserksgangr*: The *Völsunga saga* clearly to the magical origin of this mishap. And indeed, the wolf furs worn by father and son are enchanted.⁶⁰ This spell has a major impact on the process of transformation that the two characters undergo. In modern literature, the characters Sigmundr and Sinfjötli - dressed in furs and leading the lives of wolves - are often compared to the warriors referred to as *úlfheðnar* in the Old Icelandic sagas. But the historiographical sources make no connection between magic and the behavior of animal warriors - with the notable exception of the fur shirts worn by the companions of Þórir hundr in the saga of Olaf the Holy. However, this episode only occurs at a time when the remnants of paganism were classified as magic in the context of the *interpretatio christiana*⁽⁶¹⁾.

In the *Hrólfs saga kraka*⁶², Bǫðvarr bjarki seems to have much closer ties to the traditions of the berserkers. However, this figure also displays some specific characteristics that distinguish him from the beast warriors of the *Konungasö-gur*.

During the final battle of King Hrólfr kraki, Bǫðvarr first intervenes in the form of a giant bear and terrible damage on the enemy ranks.⁽⁶³⁾ When he is forced to fight in his human form,

59 Cf. the poem *Eiríksmál* (Str. 5).

60 Sigmundr and Sinfjötli discover the furs on the forest floor under the following circumstances: [. . .] *þeir finna eitt hús, ok tvá menn sofandi í húsinu með digrum gullhringum; þeir hafa orðit fyrir úsköpum; þvíathéngu í húsinu yfir þeim; it tíunda hvert dægr máttu þeir komast or hömunum; þeir voru konungasynir [. . .]* (*Völsunga saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829), p. 130). ("They find a house, and two men with thick gold rings sleeping in the house; they had met with an adverse fate; for wolf furs hung over them in the house; every tenth day they could leave this form; they were the sons of kings . . ."). stealing the furs from the two strangers, Sigmundr and Sinfjötli find themselves trapped and begin to howl like wolves.

61 This episode will be discussed in more detail later in this study (Chapter VIII). analyzed.

62 He is also mentioned under the name *Biarco* in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus (II, vi, 9-viii, 2) and in the *Bjarkarímur*.

63 *Hrólfs saga kraka* (Slay (ed.) 1960), pp. 116-119. In the *Bjarkarímur*, Bǫðvarr also transforms into a bear in a preceding scene (VIII, 4-11, pp. 160 f.). Saxo Grammaticus does not describe any transformation of the character *Biarco* in his *Gesta Danorum*.

However, despite his bravery, he can no longer influence the outcome of the battle.

The transformation of the hero seems to move the image of the wild berserker, dressed in furs and growling like a bear, into the realm of legend. Wolfgang Golther confirms in his *Handbook of Germanic Mythology*:⁶⁴ "the story may serve as a basic type of berserk saga". An examination of the Old Norse sources makes it possible to further differentiate this theory, as Breen has shown:⁶⁵ The motif of the transformation of a man into a bear, which occurs in several Icelandic sagas, is never associated with the term *ber-serkr*. Some elements of the story of Bǫðvarr are clearly different from the behavioral patterns attributed to animal warriors. The hero is not to fight in the form of a bear: at the same time as he appears on the battlefield in the form of a bear, his human shell lies in the ruler's hall. This miracle is naturally reminiscent of the old Norse ideas of the 'excursion soul' and some of the abilities attributed to the god Óðinn. The influence of these ideas on the vocabulary used for the animal warriors has already been emphasized (cf. the term *hamrammr* and the expression *eigi einhamr* etc.). The historical sources, however, never attribute to the berserkers the ability to split in two during an attack. Kveld-Úlfr's drowsiness, which is described in the *Egils saga*, has sometimes been interpreted in this context. However, the Icelandic text does not mention any animal transformation: Kveld-Úlfr's call seems to refer more to a change in behavior than to a physical transformation.

The situation is different with the legendary figure Bǫðvarr, whose strange transformation is obviously linked to the motif of the "son of the bear"⁶⁶: the

64 Golther 1895, p. 103.

65 Breen 1999a, p. 42 f.

66 The diminutive form Bjarki probably means "little bear" (cf. Müller 1970, p. 207). The motif of the "bear's son" (cf. Stitt 1992) also appears in the historiographical tradition: according to Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (XVIII, 30), an ancestor of King Sven Estridsen (1047-1076) was fathered by a bear. He was the father of Þorgils sprakaleggr, father of the jarl Úlfr and grandfather of Sven (on Þorgils and his descendants cf. *Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 134, in Hkr II, p. 300). This legend of an animal descent of the Danish ruling dynasty is based on Saxo, X, 15. The anecdote takes place in Sweden, where a young girl who is abducted by a bear gives birth to Thrugillus, *cognomine* Sprakeleg. A chronicle written in the English monastery of Crowland in the 12th century (cf. *Origo et gesta Sivardi* (Langebek (ed.) 1774, pp. 288-293 and 300 ff.)) attributes bear ears to the father of the Scandinavian-born Jarl Sivard of Northumberland, Beorn Beresun ("Beorn, son of Bera"). According to tradition, Beorn was the son of a jarl's daughter (Bera) and a bear. His son Sivard, whose existence is historically well documented, became one of King Knut the Great's retainers. Bera is also the name of Bǫðvarr's mother in the saga of Hrólfr kraki, which leads Olrik to link the legend of Beorn Beresun with the Norse saga of Bǫð-

The hero's father, Björn, takes the form of this beast after enchanted by Queen Hvít⁶⁷, who is jealous of his love for the young Bera. After Björn's death, Hvít forces Bera to eat a few pieces of his flesh. The unfortunate woman gives birth to three sons, the first two of whom have a partially animal form. Only the third is spared: Bǫð- varr, unlike his brothers, is not deformed.⁶⁸In the course of an outstanding heroic life, he faces many opponents (including several berserkers) before fighting his last battle under the banner of the famous Hrólfr kraki. The fantastic ability he uses on this occasion, which is probably an inheritance from his father, is one of the "secondary" effects of Queen Hvít's spell.

One of the many adventures recounted in the *Hrólfs saga kraka* is Bǫðvarr Bjarki's victory over a terrifying monster that repeatedly haunts King Hrólfr's realm. After defeating this monster to *jól*, Bǫðvarr forces his young protégé Hǫttr to drink the monster's blood and eat its heart. He then fakes a fight with the dead monster, which is intended to portray Hǫttr as the accomplisher of this heroic deed. Hǫttr, who is now treated as a hero, takes his place next to King Hrólfr's companions, from whom he receives the sword Gullinhjalti. The young man is also given a new weapon and a new name (Hjalti). This saga motif is reminiscent of very old initiation rites, as Dumézil has shown.⁶⁹The episode appears in a shorter form in the *Gesta Danorum* (II, vi, 11), in which Biarco forces Hialto to drink the blood of a bear.⁷⁰Was this kind of ritual performed by certain animal warrior groups? The Old Norse texts repeatedly describe the consumption of the blood (or flesh) of a bear (or of an animal).

varr (Ollrik 1903b; 1910). The motif of the union of a woman with a bear in Norse lore has been studied in the context of Sami hunting rituals by Edsman (1994; 1996). This study of the folklore of the circumpolar regions sheds light on the oldest elements of the magical practices that a hunting society associates with the cult of the "Lord of the Beasts".

67 Hvít, daughter of the king of the Finns, strikes Biorn with a wolfskin glove (*með úlf-handska*). In Old Norse sources, the *finnar* are often associated with magic and magic (cf. the episode of Þórir hundr in *Óláfs saga helga*: the iron cannot bite into Þórir's shoulder, who is clothed in a pelt he has bought from the *finnar*).

68 The legend of the three sons of Bera does not originate from a simple literary invention, but from a traditional scheme interpreted by Dumézil in an Indo-European context (Dumézil 1985, p. 210).

69 Dumézil 1985, p. 223 f.

70 According to the *Bjarkarímur* (pp. 139-142), it is the blood of a she-wolf. In the *Hrólfs saga kraka* it is not an animal, but a troll: *þat er ekki dýr, heldr er þat hit mesta tröll* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1904, p. 68).

wolf) as well as changes in behavior that follow such practice.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the individuals described in these episodes are rarely referred to as *Ber- serkers*.⁽⁷²⁾

In the personality of *Bǫðvarr bjarki*, in which, as has been shown, various aspects are united, the fusion of two archetypes becomes clear. The social status of the hero, who is an important member of the royal retinue, is reminiscent of the function of the animal warriors as elite warriors (cf. *Ha- raldskvæði*, Str. 21); *Bǫðvarr*'s semi-animal nature, in turn, lends him the character of an elite warrior.

"son of a bear" the ability to show himself in a form that is independent of his own body. This ability goes far the boundaries of the *ber- serksgangr*. According to beliefs deeply rooted in the Old Norse tradition, the ability to transform seems to be essentially linked to the intervention of magic, the transgression of certain fundamental prohibitions and the influence of a supernatural heritage (often as a result of the union of the hero's mother with a half-animal creature).

The sources that are considered to have a certain historiographical value (such as the *Konungasögur*) never link the behavior of the animal warriors with reports of animal transformations. This should not come as a surprise: In the eyes of Viking Age rulers, berserkers were undoubtedly unable to leave their human bodies to roam around in the form of a wild animal - be it under the cover of darkness!

Several iconographic sources from antiquity to the Viking Age illustrate the use of animal furs among the Scandinavian warrior elite: the depictions of armed men wearing masks and dressed in furs clearly show the importance of this tradition. Various archaeological findings (horn from Gallehus, matrices from Torslunda, figures from Ekhammar, fragments of the tapestry from Oseberg)⁷³ confirm the information from the most reliable historiographical and literary sources - these include above all the texts dealing with the Battle of Hafrsfjord (*Konungasögur*, Íslendin- *gasögur*, skaldic stanzas). The wearing of wolf pelts (*úlfheðnar*; *vargstakkar*), the screaming and howling of wild animals (or dogs: cf. the expression *grenja*

71 Cf. the episode in which King Ingiald consumes the heart of a wolf (*Ynglinga saga*, chap. XXXIV, p. 62). Reference should also be made to the episode in the *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968,

p. 285 ff.), in which Oddr Arngeirsson becomes *hamrammr* after eating the flesh of a bear.

72 The few references to the consumption of meat that can be found for berserkers all come from the realm of legend (Breen 1999a, pp. 76-79). Although Snorri includes *Bǫðvarr* and *Hjalti* among King *Hrólfr*'s berserkers, the term is rarely associated with *Bǫðvarr* in the other sources.

73 Chapter IX.

*sem hundr*⁷⁴) - all these elements, some of which depicted differently in the medieval texts, characterize the beast warriors. In this context, the vocabulary associated with the transformation of the figure (composites with *hamr*-) should not mislead the modern reader: The reputation of the berserker does not refer to the ability to change physical form, but to the expression of an animal's ferocity. Kveld-Úlfr is a typical example of this phenomenon, of which the ideas of lycanthropy provide a late and distorted picture. Dillmann aptly expresses this point of view when he says of the "evening wolf": "Ce surnom ne doit pas laisser penser que le chef norvégien se métamorphosait réellement en loup (v. isl. *úlfr*) lors de ses somnolences vespérales . . . , mais indique plutôt qu'il changeait de personnalité et, probablement, qu'il se faisait alors singulièrement dangereux . . .".⁽⁷⁵⁾

Even if the berserkers do not have the ability to perform a real physical injury. Although they possessed only one form of transformation, at certain moments they were able to turn their inner being ("l'être second qui vivait en eux", to take up the formulation used by Georges Dumézil)⁷⁶ outwards. The Old Norse sources sometimes use the expression *eigi einhamr*⁽⁷⁷⁾ ("not in possession of only one form") in connection with the beast warriors. When they into a frenzy (*hamask*), these warriors show their "second self" in the form (*hamr*) of a wild animal (bear, wolf), whose behavior (howling, ferocity) and appearance (wearing furs and masks) they take on.

This ability of the berserkers certainly explains the prestige they enjoyed among the ruling elites of ancient Scandinavia. In this pagan society, the practices of animal warriors evoked the respect of the aristocracy in two ways: the *berserksgangr* not only amplifies the powers of these furious fighters, who always in an exposed position on the battlefield; the phenomenon is also characteristic of a form of wild trance associated with the powers of the god Óðinn. This central figure of the Norse pantheon, whose name is probably associated with frenzy (cf. the Old Norse adjective *óðr*),⁷⁸ possesses the ability during battle⁷⁹,

74 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 124.

75 Dillmann 2006, p. 246, note 31.

76 Dumézil 1939, p. 82.

77 Cf. *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), p. 74 on the Berser kernels Halli and Leiknir.

78 Even though the Old Norse adjective *óðr* means "angry", the noun *óðr* also refers to the art of poetry. Óðr is also the name of an Old Norse god, the husband of Freyja. This mythological figure is often compared with Óðinn, cf. de Vries 1931, pp. 32 f. and 52-55; 1954; 1970, 2, § 400.

79 *Ynglinga saga*, ch. VI, p. 17: *er hann var í her*.

to take on a different form at will,⁸⁰ which instills fear in the enemy.⁸¹ The berserkers are introduced as "his men" (*hans menn*), loyal companions, the animal warriors, are "as wild as dogs or wolves" (*galnir sem hundar eða vargar*) and "strong as bears or bulls" (*sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar*). Snorri's text clearly the nature of these characters: They possess the strength of wild animals, but without transforming - a privilege that belongs to their god alone.

There is no information in the sources about any special training to make the *berserksgangr* easier to trigger. The phenomenon is obviously an innate tendency that hereditary (cf. the genealogy of Kveld-Úlfr in the *Egils saga*). The fits of rage often occur under unfortunate circumstances, such when Skalla-Grímr attacks his son Egill. This difficult-to-tame character undoubtedly increased the Icelandic settlers' hostility towards the beast warriors. In fact, the social and religious environment in Iceland was not very to the berserkers.⁸² Without an indigenous monarchy, the cult of the god, first practiced by kings and jarl, seems to have been hardly practiced.⁸³ As a result, the savagery of the beast warriors was deprived of its heroic dimension: it was perceived only as a disruption of the established order. In the course of this study (Chapter VII), this development, which led to the decline and disappearance of the beast warriors towards the end of the Viking Age, will be addressed again. In this context, it will be analyzed the Icelandic sources approached the subject of the "berserker", which is sometimes reduced to a stereotypical figure without historical reference. The literary places of worship very often deviate from the mythological beliefs and cultic customs on which the tradition of animal warriors is based.

In one of his poems, Egill Skallagrímsson describes the loyalty he has long Óðinn, the "most important of the gods" (*goðjaðarr*), and to whom the skald owes his poetic talent⁸⁴ (incidentally, his father and grandfather also have the ability to improvise skaldic stanzas)⁸⁵.

80 *Ynglinga saga*, ch. VI, p. 17: *hann skipti litum ok líkjum áhverja lund, er hann vildi*.

81 *Ynglinga saga*, ch. VI, p. 17: *þá sýndisk hann grimligr óvinum*.

82 Cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 262 f.

83 Cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 263, note 103. Dillmann refers to the studies of Turville-Petre (1958 and 1972), among others, and points to the importance that Þórr and Freyr had in the Icelandic cult, which is also supported by the eponymological evidence.

84 Cf. stanzas 22-24 of the *Sonatorrek*, in which the skald, dismayed by the death of his second son Óðinn, accuses Egill of having broken the bond between them (*Skj.* A:1, p. 43, B:1, p. 41).

85 *Skj.* A:1, p. 29 f., B:1, p. 26 f. The *vísa* attributed to Kveld-Úlfr calls the god Óðinn by the name Þundr; on this name cf. Falk 1924, p. 31.

This connection to the Berserker deity is in all likelihood based on a legacy from his ancestors.

The thesis of an "Odin" family tradition makes it possible to interpret the behavior of Kveld-Úlfr on the basis of evidence from pagan Scandinavia. It us to the *berserksgangr* with very old cults and myths, compared to which the medieval idea of the werewolf only a weak and distorted echo. The *Egils saga*, which was written in the 13th century, naturally shows traces of these changes. However, the description of Kveld-Úlfr's character is more than just the simple story of a werewolf: although it is an indirect, late tradition, this account clearly preserves the memory of authentic practices. The uncanny "nocturnal" behavior of Egill's ancestors, associated with the animal ferocity that afflicts Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr at nightfall,⁸⁶ must be embedded in the beliefs and customs of the Viking Age.

Without systematically linking the onset of the *berserksgangr* to the onset of darkness, several Old Norse sources describe how the berserkers challenge the guests of the *jól festivities* to battle during the winter cycle of the 'twelve nights'.⁸⁷ This literary motif is very revealing with regard to the role attributed to the animal warriors during cultic acts. During the *jól period*, the ancient Scandinavians paid homage above all, as can be seen from one of the epithets of this god in Old Norse literature: Jólnir.⁸⁸ According to modern Scandinavian folk tradition, the "wild hunt" appears on Yule night, during which the hosts of spirits make their appearance.⁸⁹ This phenomenon bears the name "Odens jagd" or "Odens jakt" in some areas of Denmark and Sweden and is as "jo- lareidi", "jolaskreidi" and "oskoreidi" in Norway.⁹⁰ connection with the

86 The figure of the beast warrior Ljótr hinn bleiki, whose fury only comes to light during the day, appears to be a perfect stereotype in comparison - this is also shown by an examination of the topoi associated with the description of berserkers in the Icelandic sagas (see Chapter VII below).

87 Cf. two episodes in the *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), pp. 62-71 and 135 ff.; *Svarfdæla saga*, pp. 142-148. For further references see Breen 1999a, p. 172.

88 Cf. Falk 1924, p. 20 f., who quotes in particular the expression Óðinn [. . .] heitir [. . .] Jólnir af þui at þeir drogu þat af iolunum ("Óðinn . . . means . . . Jólnir, because they derive it from Jól") (*Halfdanar þáttur svarta*, p. 564). On Yule in the Old Norse sources, cf. e.g. Celander 1955; Hultgård 2000.

89 Several traditions in various forms that are associated with the motif of the 'wild hunt' are known from the Germanic world. Cf. the evidence collected by Höfler in 1934.

90 Cf. Olrik 1901; Hægstad 1912; Celander 1943; de Vries 1970, I, p. 233; Sandaaker 1968; Eike 1978; Eike 1980.

The cult of the dead (cf. the term *drauga-dróttin*),⁹¹ which exists above all in a warlike context (especially in connection with the myth of Valhalla), is well documented in the Old Norse world.⁹²

In Germanic prehistory, certain groups of warriors were identified with ghost armies. Tacitus describes the fearsome appearance of some fighters who were known to the Vandals as the Harii. With the help of camouflage (*nigra scuta, tincta corpora*), the members of this band embody an "army of the dead" (*feralis exercitus*), which prefers to strike in the darkest nights.⁽⁹³⁾ Georges Dumézil⁹⁴ compares these nocturnal attacks with the evening behavior of Kveld-Úlfr, whose outbursts of rage occur mainly under the cover of darkness. *The feralis exercitus* of the Harii is also reminiscent of the northern *einherjar*, the chosen dead who are supposed to defend Valhalla.⁹⁵ Harii and *ein-herjar* bear related names whose etymology refers to the idea of an army (cf. an. *herr*, which also occurs in the word part *-herjar*).⁹⁶ According to stanza 41 of the *Vafþrúðnismál*, which Snorri quotes in chapter 41 of the *Gylfaginning*, the *einherjar* fight each other every day indwelling place before they reconcile in the evening.

A related tradition, the "battle of the Hjaðningar" (*Hjaðningavíg*), is also mentioned in the *Skáldskaparmál* (based on stanzas 8-11 of the *Ragnarsdrápa* by the Norwegian skald Bragi inn gamli Boddason from the early 9th century).⁹⁷ In the course of this legendary battle, which is said to last until the twilight of the gods, the dead of the two armies awaken to new life every morning. The plural form Hjaðningar means "Heðinn and his own".⁹⁸ And indeed, the leader of one of the two armies bears the name Heðinn.⁹⁹ Christof Landolt

91 *Ynglinga saga*, ch. VII, p. 18.

92 Cf. von Unwert 1911; Neckel 1913; Marold 1972; Nordberg 2003.

93 *Germania*, XLIII On the Harians, cf. e.g. Gutenbrunner 1940; Neumann / Castritius 1999.

94 Dumézil 1939, p. 83.

95 The following Eddic and Skaldic sources transmit this idea: *Vafþrúðnis- mál*, Str. 41, *Grimnismál*, Str. 18, 23, 36, 51, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri*, Str. 38, *Eiríksmál*, Str. 1 and *Hákonarmál*, Str. 16. 1 and *Hákonarmál*, Str. 16. The tradition of the *Gylfaginning* is obviously based on these texts (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, chap. XX, p. 27, chap. XXXVI-XLI, pp. 40-44, chap. LI, p. 72, chap. LII, S. 74). The singular form *einheri* is attested only once in connection with the god Þórr (*Lokasenna*, Str. 60).

96 The Old Norse *herr* ("army"), which occurs in the element *-herjar* ("those who are part of the army"), shows a clear etymological relationship with the name Harii (cf. de Vries 1962, p. 224; Elmevik 1982; Beck 1989). On the ideas of the afterlife in connection with the Old Norse warrior ideology, see Schjødt 1999 and 2007; Hultgård 2011.

97 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 153 f.

98 Dillmann (transl.) 2005, p. 211; see also Höfler 1934, p. 167 f.

99 The latter abducts Hildir, the daughter of King Høgni. The Hjaðningar are known in German literature under the name Hegelinge (cf. the Middle High German poem *Kudrun* with the abduction of Hilde, daughter of Hagen, by Hetel) and under the name Heodings in Anglo-German literature.

points out that the term *Hjaðningavíg* is probably old, "since it was still subject to the breaking of /e/ (**heþan-*) to /ja/ (**hjaþan-*), which dates back to the 8th century".¹⁰⁰ The origin of this first name is probably related to the customs of animal warriors: the term *heðinn*, which stands for fur clothing, also appears in the compound *úlfheðinn*, which is also documented as a proper name.

In the same context, Otto Höfler refers to the legendary King Guðmundr,¹⁰¹ ruler of the mythical kingdom of *Glasisvellir* (or *Glæsisvellir*, "shining fields"). According to the *Heiðreks saga*¹⁰², the pagans regard Guðmundr as a god whose kingdom lies in an area *Ódáinsakr* ('field of the undead').¹⁰³ In this realm dwell people who escape old age and death. The *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* (chapters V and XII) presents Guðmundr on the one hand as the son of, and on the other as the father of Heiðrekr ("in the form of a wolf").¹⁰⁴ The Old Norse sources thus link the naming traditions of the animal warriors with certain representations of the afterlife. Georges Dumézil has also suggested that the berserkers are the earthly counterpart of the *einherjar*.¹⁰⁵ This interpretation, which is very close to the theories of Lily Weiser-Aall and Otto Höfler, refers primarily to chapter VI of the *Ynglinga saga*.¹⁰⁶

Saxon literature (cf. the poems *Widsith* and *Dēor*). It should be noted that in *Widsith* Heo- den (mhd. Hetel, an. Heðinn) is referred to as the king of the Glomman. Much (1920) translates this ethnonym as "the barkers", meaning "wolves". In connection with the Heodingas/Hegelings, however, the English and German sources do not describe the motif of 'eternal struggle'. In his *Gesta* (V, ix), Saxo again reports an episode that is close to the *Hjaðningavíg*: Hilda (an. Hildir) summons the manes of Hitinus and Høginus (Heðinn and Høgni) every night so that they may resume the battle. On the legendary circle of Hilde in Germanic literature, see Frankis 1979; Landolt 1999b; 1999c.

100 Landholt 1999c, p. 565.

101 Höfler 1934, p. 172 f.

102 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 1.

103 Cf. Heizmann 1998 et 2002a.

104 Sveinbjörn Egilsson / Þorgeir Guðmundsson (eds.) 1827, pp. 183 and 197. Tietz, Andrea (ed./trans.) 2012, pp. 48-49, 76-77.

105 Cf. Dumézil 1939, p. 81.

106 Many scholars have long taken Snorri's text (following Arngrímur Jónsson's example) literally (cf. Ramelius 1725). Martin Ninck (1935) refers to Óðinn as "Lord of the Berserkers". However, some authors, including Klaus von See 1961b, reject Snorri Sturluson's tradition, considering it "late" and untrustworthy. This judgment ignores the manifold relationships between Odin's mythology and the traditions of the berserkers, which are examined in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter VI

The Berserkers and Odin's mythology: the tradition of Snorri Sturluson

A The transformations Óðinn in the *Heimskringla*

In his *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson describes the core elements of mythology from an euhemeristic perspective.¹ Óðinn is portrayed as a powerful leader who combines both martial and magical abilities. The exercise of the lordly function, which cannot be separated from the martial aspects, is closely linked to magical-religious rituals.

However, these areas do not completely. One of Óðinn's many abilities is the gift of being able to change his appearance at will. Snorri mentions this ability twice: the first time when he describes the Asen's martial exploits, and finally when he lists his magical powers. In chapter VI of the saga, Snorri describes the phenomenon in the following words:

En þá er hann var í her, þá sýndisk hann grimligr sínum óvinum; en þat bar til þess, at hann kunni þær íþróttir, at hann skipti litum ok líkjum á hverja lund, er hann vildi.²

(But when he was in the army, he seemed wild to his enemies; and that was because he had the ability to change his appearance and shape into any form he wanted).

In chapter VII, Snorri uses the expression *Óðinn skipti hǫmum* ("Óðinn changes the hamr", that is, "he has the power to change"). The text goes into more detail about the nature of these transformations:

[. . .] lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr, ok föreinni svipstund á fjarlæg lǫnd at sínum erendum eða annarra manna.³

([. . .] the body lay there as if asleep or dead, but it was a bird or a beast, fish or snake, and in a single moment it reached a distant land on its own behalf or that of other men).

1 According to Snorri, Óðinn and the Asen, who are depicted as historical figures, originally came from Asia (*Ynglinga saga*, p. 10). In the 18th century, Samuel Ödman extended this motif to the berserkers by considering the possibility that Óðinn had taught his warriors the tradition of taking toadstools, which originated in Asia (Ödman 1784, p. 246 f.).

2 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 17.

3 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 18.

In the first quotation, which concerns the warlike traits of the deity, Snorri's description of Óðinn's transformations is more laconic than in the second section: the lord of Asgard, whose frequent metamorphoses sow fear among his enemies, does not give up his human form when battle breaks out. He personally intervenes alongside the army (*i her*).

Óðinn thus seems to have mastered two different techniques: One, which is practiced exclusively in a martial context, allows him to spread panic in the enemy ranks by assuming a fearsome appearance; the second, which is purely magical in nature, allows him to leave his own body to move in the guise of various animals.

These two methods are named by Snorri under different headings in chapters relating to different areas.⁴ While chapter VI mainly describes Óðinn's oratory talent and his intervention in battle, chapter VII is mainly devoted to magic.

B Snorri Sturluson's description of the *berserksgangr*

The abilities attributed Óðinn in Chapter VI of the *Ynglinga saga* correspond to what is expected of members of the aristocracy: eloquence, martial exploits, poetic talent.

Like all Germanic rulers, the god advances during battle surrounded by his followers (*hans menn*), in whom he awakens the fury of the *berserksgangr*.⁵ Unimpressed by flames and iron⁶, they imitate the behavior of wild animals; they instill fear in the enemy through their appearance and their ferocity. But do they also have the ability to transform? They do not undergo a physical transformation - as the use of the conjunction *sem* in the text makes clear: *hans menn [. . .] váru gálnir sem hundar eða vargar, [. . .] sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar*.⁷

Snorri makes no reference to the wearing of animal skins, but claims that Óðinn's warriors usually fight without armor.⁸ He seems to rely on an erroneous etymological interpretation, which takes the root *ber-* (*nudus*) as the origin of the first part of the compound *ber-serkr*. This error is easy to explain: In the Icelandic language of the 13th century

4 Chapters VI and VII of the *Ynglinga saga* bear the following titles: *Frá atgørvi Óðins* and *Frá íþróttum Óðins* according to the *Kringla* manuscript; *Talpar íþróttir Óðins* and *Sagt frá fjolkyngi Óðins* in the *Codex Frisianus* (p. 16 and p. 18 annotation apparatus).

5 *Ynglinga saga*, p. 17 (see introduction above).

6 Cf. the phrase *hvártíki eldr né járn orti á þá* (*Ynglinga saga*, p. 17).

7 *Ynglinga saga*, p. 17.

8 Cf. the expression *föru brynjulausir*.

the old etymon **ber-* (*ursus*) is no longer associated with the bear, for which the form *björn* has long been established (see chapter II above). In addition, the berserker had already from Scandinavian society long before Snorri's birth.⁹ He could only have fragmentary information on this subject: skaldic poems and Icelandic or Norwegian oral traditions.

Moreover, the ferocity of the animal warriors is reminiscent of a motif that is well documented in Old Norse literature: that of the warrior stripping off his armor before pouncing on his enemies.¹⁰ Did this image influence the literary description of the berserkers? It may not just be a literary topos: some animal warriors may have actually practiced this on the battlefield. Nevertheless, the main characteristic of berserkers is not their equipment, but the frenzy that seizes them in battle.

Despite the lack of direct evidence, Snorri captures the central aspect of the berserker tradition: their ecstatic fits of rage confirm the closeness of these warriors to their god, whose name also refers to fury (*óðr*).

In attributing an Odin influence to the *berserksgangr*, Snorri is probably referring to an authentic tradition that survived from pagan Scandinavia. The berserkers, who are called men *Óðinns* (*hans menn*), are not described as purely mythological beings in this case: In several episodes of *Heimskringla*, Snorri has animal warriors appear who clearly portrayed as historical figures. One of the stanzas of *Haraldskvæði* quoted in *Haralds saga hárfagra* confirms the participation of the Berkers in the battle in Hafsfjord (*Haraldskvæði*, Str. 8). The beast warriors thus belong to this world, while at the same time swearing allegiance to the one-eyed god. But what is the nature of this loyalty?

According to the Old Norse sources, Óðinn brings to himself all those who fall in battle (*egnaði sér alla vápndauða menn*).¹¹ The deceased warriors form a warlike elite in Valhalla, which gathers there in anticipation of the twilight of the gods.⁽¹²⁾ The *einherjar* finally take over under the supreme of the Aesir.

9 According to the historiographical sources, the last appearance of a group of beast warriors seems to have been that of Þórir hundr and his companions on the battlefield of Stiklastaðir (see Ch. VIII below).

10 Reference should be made here to stanza IV of *Hákonarmál*, which illustrates this motif in the historical context of the heroic death of King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri on the battlefield of Storö in 961 (cf. Jón Helgason (ed.) 1961, p. 25). Snorri quotes the poem in his *Hákonar saga góða* (pp. 212 and 219). The tradition of fighting *nudis corporibus* is very well documented in the ancient Germanic world (cf. Tacitus, *Historiae*, II, xxii).

11 *Ynglinga saga*, p. 22.

12 Cf. stanza 7 of the *Eiríksmál*: Óðinn drops Eiríkr's blood axe on the battlefield to take him into his army of death. For no one knows when the "gray wolf" (i.e. the wolf Fenrir) will attack.

the role the beast warriors in the entourage of the pagan rulers. Joining Óðinn is an honor, a glorious destiny to which the berserkers in particular are called. In this context, they appear as the earthly counterpart to the *einherjar*.

Their participation in cult rituals *at jól time*, which are partly dedicated to the memory of the ancestors, belongs to the same world of imagination. The wearing of bear or wolf furs is also part of the rites surrounding the cycle of the twelve nights, as recorded in the "Book of Ceremonies" by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. This text describes the cult dance performed by the warrior mercenaries dressed in furs during the Christmas festivities at the court of Byzantium⁽¹³⁾.

One of the matrices of Torslunda, found on the Swedish island of Öland and dating to the 6th or 7th century, combines the depiction of a warrior dressed in a wolf's pelt with that of a one-eyed figure; this is one of the features by which Óðinn can be recognized.¹⁴ As Heinrich Beck has shown, this depiction is echoed in the eighth stanza of *Háleygjatal*, a poem written in the 10th century by the skald Eyvindr skálda- spillir.¹⁵

The mimetic practices allow the berserkers to represent their true nature as animal warriors to the outside world by adopting the behavior of wild animals, some of which also associated with Óðinn. This custom is passed on in some important genealogies (cf. the genealogy of Kveld-Úlfr). The hereditary nature of the phenomenon, which is also evident in the naming traditions of these warrior dynasties, unites the sphere of the living with that of the dead. During the battle, but also during certain nights of the year, the animal warriors identify with the army of the dead.

In the retinue of King Haraldr hárfagri, the berserkers are referred to as *úlfheðnar*. This noun certainly refers to the wearing of wolf pelts. The element -*heðinn* (pl. *heðnar*, "shirt", "fur garment") appears in the name of the *Hjaðningar*. The Old Norse tradition ascribes to this mythical army a similar function to that the *einherjar* until the onset of the gods' demonization. The behavior of the animal warriors thus underlines their role as "Warrior Óðinns" and is associated with some aspects of a death cult. The tradition of wearing animal skins during the winter disguise in the Scandi-

13 *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* (Vogt (ed./trans.) 1939), pp. 182-185. The term "Varangians" is by "Goths" in this source. In view of the period to which the text, however, it seems appropriate to regard these 'Goths' as Scandinavian mercenaries (cf. Sjöberg 1907). However, the reference to Gothic or Old Norse traditions is disputed in research (cf. Kraus 1895; Müller 1882; Tischler 1998).

14 Bruce-Mitford 1968, pl. XVI, fig. IV. On the "Odin-like" character of the figure accompanying the animal warrior, see Hauck 1954, plate II; Hauck 1982b, p. 333; Arrhenius / Freij 1992, p. 76, p. 80 f.

15 Beck 1968a, p. 247 f.

Naval folk custom as well as the later reports the appearance of dogs and wolves¹⁶during the "wild hunt" seem to confirm this thesis.¹⁷Despite the poor source situation with regard to the Odin character of the Old Norse berserkers¹⁸, Snorri's relatively isolated statement, which is probably based on an authentic tradition, cannot therefore be dismissed out of hand.

C, god of animal warriors: confirmation of the tradition Snorri

The etymology of the name Óðinn suggests a direct connection to the Ra- serei des *berserksgangr* and in this way lends a certain authenticity to Snorri's tradition.

An echo of these Old Norse ideas can be found in Adam of Bremen's *Descriptio insularum aquilonis* from the 11th century. He describes the second figure of the triad of gods from Uppsala with the words *wodan, id est furor*.¹⁹Adam adds, comparing Wodan with the god Mars: *bella gerit, hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos*. In the eyes of the warriors he leads, this Wodan thus embodies warlike fury.

The name of this deity, which is transmitted in Old Norse in the form Óðinn, in Anglo-Saxon as *Woden* and in Old High German as *Wuotan* (*Wotan*), comes from Urgerman. **Wōðanaz*.²⁰The root **wōð-*²¹also appears in the Old Norse adjective *óðr* ("angry", "furious", "mad"), in the Old Norse noun *óðr* ("spirit", "song", "poetry"),²²in Old English *wód* (*rabiem*,

16 In the Germanic tradition, these two animals often correspond to interchangeable symbols, such as the use of wolf pelts (*vargstakkar*) by the companions Þórir hundrs, which were used in the "legendary" version of the *Óláfs saga helga* as "dogs" (Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, p. 196 f.).

17 Cf. Höfler 1934, p. 55 f. ("Totenhund und Totenwolf im mimischen Kult").

18 Breen 1999a, p. 159 f. compares this small number of sources with the large number of narratives in which the berserker with the stereotypical features of the *blámaðr* ('black man', 'Moors', 'Ethiopians'), for which, according to Breen, there is about 60 times as much evidence as for the connection between the Berserkers and. However, this finding is not of central from a historical perspective, as it basically only reveals the development of a literary motif.

19 *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, IV, 26 (Schmeidler (ed.) 1917, p. 258).

20 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 416.

21 Höfler 1973a, p. 110.

22 Cf. Baetke 1976; *IED*, p. 471. Óðr is also the name of Freyja's husband (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* [Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931], p. 38). The name Óðr can probably be derived from a u-stem: **wōþu* (cf. the male name *WoduridaR*, 'furious rider', on the Tune stone in Norway, 5th century, in Krause / Jankuhn 1966, p. 162 f.). De Vries

insaniam),²³ in Old High German *wuot*⁽²⁴⁾ ("rage", "fury") and in Gothic *wōds* ("frenzied", "possessed").²⁵

In the construction of the name *Wōðanaz, the word stem *wōða-* is combined with the suffix *-no, which is found in several Indo-European languages.²⁶ This form expresses the idea of exercising power over a group ("ruler suffix"). In the Old Norse language, several derivations of this kind are known:²⁷ *dróttin* denotes the "leader of the following (*drótt*)", *þjóðann* the "prince", i.e. the "leader of the people (*þjóð*)"; *herjan* is one of Óðinn's epithets as well as the "leader of the army" (*herr*). Emile Benveniste draws on this evidence to formulate a convincing etymological interpretation of the name *Wōðanaz: "Dans ces suffixations secondaires en -nos, le terme radical désigne en général une collectivité, une fraction sociale. Pour qu'une notion abstraite comme **wōða-* tiennne cette place, il faut transposer l'abstrait en collectif et entendre *wōða-* comme 'les gens possédés par la fureur'. . . . Wotan-Odin en serait donc le chef."²⁸ In the mythological tradition of Scandinavia, the god, himself the epitome of frenzy, is the leader of a group of fierce warriors who the ability to *berserksgangr*.

The idea of a warlike deity surrounded by a stormy force can already be found in the oldest Indo-European traditions. The fearsome Maruts of Vedic literature (Sanskrit Marútaḥ), who are associated with the war deities Indra and Rudra, have long been compared to the Old Norse *einherjar*.²⁹ These mythological figures from ancient India form the Aryan counterpart to the Germanic "wild hunt"⁽³⁰⁾ which is led by Wotan (cf. above all the expression *Wutanes her*, which is used in the 14th century in the *Munich Night Blessing*).³¹

1970, 2, § 400, the form Óðr, which is much older than the name Óðinn, is nevertheless connected with its origin. According to de Vries 1962, p. 416, the Old Norse adjective *óðr* is related to the Latin *vātes* ("prophet", "seer") or the Old Irish *fāith* ("poet") (cf. Pokorny 1959, p. 1113 on the Indo-European root **wōt-*, "to be spiritually stimulated").

23 Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, 1, 1261.

24 Schade 1872-1882, 2, p. 1215.

25 Feist 1939, p. 572 f.; Braune 1956, p. 200.

26 Cf. Meid 1957; Benveniste 1969, p. 109 f. and 302 f.; Kershaw 2000, p. 74 f. According to Zimmer 2015,

p. 387, the name Wotan can be derived from an Indo-European root *h₂u eh₍₁₎* -, "to blow", and reconstructed as **wōðu-na-z* (cf. **wō-ðu-*, "blowing, roaring", an. *óðr*, "rage") with the meaning: "whose area of responsibility is blowing". In principle, however, this proposal does not contradict the "traditional" idea of an "angry" God.

27 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 85.

28 Benveniste 1969, 1, p. 302 f.

29 Cf. Dumézil 1985, p. 169.

30 Cf. von Schröder 1908, p. 121 f.; Otto 1932, p. 39 and 58 f. See also Kershaw 2000.

31 Cf. von Grienberger 1897, also Höfler 1973a, pp. 32, 82 f., 117 and 226.

Rudra, father of the Maruts,³² also bears the name *ganapati*, "leader of the troops" (cf. the Old Norse *herjan*).³³ He is clothed with an animal skin (Sanskrit *kṛttivāsin*, "fur-clad") and is described with the typical character traits of a hunter (Sanskrit *mṛgavyādha*).³⁴ In one of the songs of *Yajurveda*, Rudra's companions are given the epithet *śvapati*, "owners of dogs, herders of dogs", among others.³⁵ The gods Bhava and Sarva, who are related to Rudra, wander around in the forests like wild wolves.³⁶

The figures of Rudra³⁷ and Óðinn show an undeniable similarity: the gods, surrounded by a berserk troop, share above all the same warlike reputation, the same ability to perform transformations in animal form, and the same willingness to provoke warlike frenzy⁽³⁸⁾.

The parallels between Vedic and Norse mythology, which are strongly separated by time and space, are necessarily based on common ideas originating from a distant Indo-European past⁽³⁹⁾.

32 *Rgveda*, II, 33, 1.

33 Cf. Kershaw 2000, p. 212.

34 Cf. Wikander 1938, p. 73.

35 Cf. Kershaw 2000, p. 222.

36 Cf. Wikander 1938, p. 73.

37 On the connections between the mythical figure of Rudra and the customs attributed to some men's bands (ecstatic frenzy, werewolf traits), see Wikander 1938,

p. 67 f.; Arbman 1922, p. 291; Kershaw 2000, p. 210 f.; McCone 1987, p. 120 f.; Przyluski 1940, p. 140. 38 Óðinn also has strong similarities with Indra: he too is described as the leader of the Maruts (sometimes called *indrāyēṣṭha*, "those who have Indra as their leader", cf. Dumézil 1985, p. 154), he is accustomed to transforming himself (cf. *Rgveda*, VI, 47, 15-18, quoted in Dumézil 1985, p. 75); his powerlessness after the victory over the monster Vṛtra shows similarities to the exhaustion that follows the *berserksgangr* (Dumézil 1985, p. 188 f.).

39 Cf. Kershaw 2000 (Chapter IX: "Odin analogues"), pp. 180-199 for an overview of the Indo-European tradition associated with the "wild" god. The role of the wolf in the mythology, cults and naming traditions of many Indo-European peoples, often associated with the formation of cultic or warlike alliances of men, confirms the great age and significance of this tradition. For an overview of this question, see also Kershaw 2000 (Ch. VIII: "Canis and the *koryos"), pp. 133-179. The ancient sources also illustrate this tradition. Pausanias (VIII, 38, 6-7) reports on the cult of Zeus Lykaios in Arcadia, while Plato (*Politeia*, VIII) and Pliny (*Historia naturalis*, VIII, xxxiv) mention cannibalism and werewolf ideas in this context. According to Herodotus (IV, 105), the Neuri, neighbors of the Scythians, had the reputation of being able to turn into a wolf once a year. According to Strabon (*Geographika*, V, 4, 12), the name Hirpini comes from a Sabine word for wolf. The name of the Dacians was undoubtedly formed according to a similar principle: *dāos* is the Phrygian name for the wolf, as recorded by Hesychios of Alexandria (for the root **dhāu*, "to strangle, throttle", see Eliade 1959). The name of the Hyrcans in ancient Persia certainly also alludes to the wolf (Strabon, *Geographika*, XI, 9, 1; cf. the Avestan *vāhrka*, "wolf"). Among the Scythians, some warrior groups seem to have worn canid skins (cf. Ivančik 1993). Among the Hittites, the "dog people" and the "wolf people" played a priestly role in cultic ceremonies (cf. Ja-

These similarities can confirm the value of Snorri Sturluson's tradition: The Icelandic historian is probably relying on an authentic tradition when he attributes the origin of the *berserksgangr* Óðinn.

In his *Prose Edda*, Snorri also describes berserkers near Óðinn: during the burial of Baldr, he entrusts four animal warriors with guarding the wolf on which the giantess Hyrrokkin is riding.⁴⁰ This scene is certainly not solely due to Snorri's imagination. The image of a wolf on which a large figure is riding also appears on the stone from Hunnestad (Skåne) from the 11th century.⁴¹ It is therefore an old motif.

Although this example clearly shows that certain motifs and fragments of tradition are faithfully handed down by Snorri, it is nevertheless possible that in this case he added the detail of the berserkers as a supplement to the original narrative. In any case, the text confirms the "Odin" character that Snorri assigns to the berserkers: These beast warriors do not belong exclusively to the mortal world; they can also make their appearance in the environment of the Aesir. Snorri Sturluson thus integrates the berserkers into the mythology of the old North.

kob-Rost 1966). The wolf plays an important role in the beliefs of the Balts and Slavs, and this in a form that is often reminiscent of werewolves (for the region, see Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, XVIII, 45; von Bruiningk 1924; for the Slavic region, see especially Kretzenbacher 1968; Jakobson / Ruzicic 1950). The symbolic content of the wolf and the dog in a warlike context is also well documented among the Celts (cf. in particular the four studies by McCone 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987). In the Ulster cycle, Sétanta is given the epithet Cúchulainn ("Hound of Culann") after he has accomplished one of his first heroic deeds: The young hero guards the dwelling of the blacksmith Culann, whose wild dog he just strangled. Some time later, while fighting the three sons of Nechta, Cúchulainn indulges in a frenetic rage (air. *ferg*). The Ulaid have to put him in a cauldron of cold water to extinguish his rage (cf. the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*: O'Rahilly (ed.) 1976, p. 25). In the German world, several historical or mythical peoples derive their name from the dog or wolf: The Winniler, ancestors of the Lombards, among whom Paulus Diaconus mentions the dog-headed (*Historia Langobardorum*, I, 7-11; Much 1924, p. 109 f.), the Glomman, who are mentioned in the *Widsith* (Much 1920), the Hundingas and the Ylfingar, who appear in Saxon and Old Norse heroic poetry, etc. (Much 1920).

40 *Gylfaginning*, ch. XLIX (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 65): *Par var sent i lotvneima eptir gygi þeiri, er Hyrrokkin h(et); en er hon kom ok reið vargi ok hafði havggorm at tavnvm, þa liop hon af hestnvm, en Opinn kallapi til berserki iiii. At gæta hestzins, ok fengv þeir eigi haldit, nema þeir feldi hann.* ("Then they sent to Jotunheim for the giantess, whose name was Hyrrokkin; and when she came, she rode on a warg and had snakes for bridles. She jumped from her mount, and Óðinn summoned four berserkers to hold the mount, and they were unable to hold it until they threw it to the ground.").

41 Cf. Jansson 1987, p. 150: The rider uses a snake as a rein, which ends in the wolf's snout.

No source is as explicit about this mythological or religious dimension of the tradition of the beast warriors as the *Edda* or the *Heimskringla*. Other texts, such as the *Egils saga*, nevertheless provide some evidence that points to a connection between the beast warriors and the cult of Óðinn (cf. the Óðinnsglaube of the skald Egill, whose ancestors could be seized by the *berserksgangr*). In the prehistoric sagas, some berserkers seem to be favored by Óðinn. Framarr, opponent of Ketill hængr in the saga of the same name,⁴² obviously enjoys the god's protection.⁴³ The description of this person also hints at his nature as an animal warrior.⁴⁴ In the *Egils saga einhenda*, the berserkers Hrærekr and Siggeirr decide to sacrifice their prisoner Ásmundr to thank Óðinn for the victory they have won (cf. the expression *gefa hann til sigrs sér*).⁴⁵

An examination of Old Norse poetry also underlines the analogy between the abilities attributed the deity and the behavior of her protégés. Several Óðinnsnamen (*heiti*) confirm this similarity.

42 *Ketils saga hængs*, pp. 107-139. This prehistoric saga was probably written in the 13th century, although the surviving manuscripts are younger.

43 Framarr owes Óðinn his invulnerability to the bite of swords: Þat hafði Óðinn skapat Framari, at hann bitu eigi járn (p. 132). After finally losing a duel against Ketill, Framarr accuses Óðinn of having destroyed the faith he had in him (p. 139); the stanza recited by Framarr is reminiscent of Egill's lament in the *Sonatorrek* (lines 22 and 23, *Skj.* A:1, p. 43, B:1, p. 37).

44 Thanks to Óðinn's help, the iron does not "bite" Framarr (Þat hafði Óðinn skapat Framari, at hann bitu eigi járn); the Viking king (*vikinga konúgr*) performs pagan sacrifices (*hann var blótmaðr*) on Swedish soil (*hann átti ríki í Húnaveldi á Gestrekalandi*). Cf. *Ketill's saga hængs* (p. 132): Framarr challenges Ketill to a duel on a hill near Árhaug (an earth mound where the king performs sacrificial acts) during the first day of jól (*Skoraði Framarr Ketil á hólmi við Árhaug jóladaginn fyrsta*). Before the battle begins, he comes to the burial mound howling like an animal warrior: *Framarr fjór grenjandi til haugsins* (p. 136). Several motifs in this tale are reminiscent of a berserker story: the invulnerability to iron, the animal-like howling, the performance of pagan sacrifices, the origin from Sweden, the choice of the jól period as well as the motif of the duel provoked by the rejection of Ketill's daughter, whose hand Framarr has asked for (on this topic see the study by Blaney 1982). Although this stereotypical description has no historical value, this example, taken from the prehistoric saga genre, shows that the Odin character associated with the berserkers was also transmitted independently of Snorri.

45 *Egils saga einhenda* (Lagerholm (ed.) 1927), p. 37.

Grímr and Grímnir recall the wearing of masks,⁴⁶ Loðungr the wearing of furs.⁴⁷ Bjarki,⁴⁸ Björn,⁴⁹ Hram(m)i,⁵⁰ Hríótr,⁵¹ Jólfr⁵² and Jólfrúðr⁵³ refer more or less directly to the bear. Þrasarr⁵⁴ refers to frenzy. Ómi was related to the practice of "singing under the shield" (cf. str. 156 of the *Hávamál*).⁵⁵ Gøllnir, Gøllorr and Gøllunr represent Óðinn as a raging

46 Falk 1924, p. 14; *Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), p. 27; *Grímnismál*, Str. 46, 47 and 49. On the meaning of the part of the word *-gríma- in Germanic namology, see Müller 1970, p. 218 f.; de Vries (1962, p. 188) makes clear: "The Odin names [Grímr, Grímnir] are to be explained by the transformation cults in which animal masks were worn".

47 *Pulur*, IV, jj, 7 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 682, B:1, p. 673); Falk 1924, p. 23. Falk rejects Finnur Jónsson's interpretation, who suggests replacing Loðungr with Lønðungr for metrical reasons (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 388). In the *Grímnismál* (Str. 1.4), Óðinn is dressed in a fur shirt (*loði*).

48 Falk 1924, pp. 4 and 41. The metaphor *stála bjarki* denotes a warrior and is one of the *kenningar* used in skaldic poetry (Rongvaldr jarl kali Kolsson, *Lausavísa*, 14, v. 5; *Skj.* A:1, P. 508, B:1, P. 482). In this context, Falk interprets Bjarki as a *heiti* for. However, the name can also refer to the famous hero Bøðvarr bjarki (as interpreted by Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 48; cf. also Meissner 1921, p. 183).

49 Falk 1924, pp. 4 f. and 41. Óðinn introduces himself in *Harðar saga*, chap. XV (Jón Sigurðsson (ed.) 1847, pp. 43 f.) with the name Björn. Cf. also the commentary by Höfler 1952a, p. 237, note 527 and p. 329 f. It should also be noted that Björn is also one of the *heiti* for the god (*Pulur*, IV, d; *Skj.*, A:1, p. 657, B:1, p. 660).

50 Falk 1924, pp. 18 and 41; Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 276; *Pulur*, IV, jj, 4 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 681, B:1, p. 673). Falk derives this name from the Old Norse *hrammr*, which is used in the sense of "bear paw" (Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 276). De Vries (1962, p. 251) translates it as "the ripper".

51 Falk 1924, pp. 18 and 41; *Pulur*, IV, jj, 4 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 681, B:1, p. 673). Cf. the verb *hrjóta*, which is sometimes used in the meaning "to growl" (like a bear) (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 284; *Hamðismál*, Str. 25: *sem biörn hryti*).

52 Falk 1924, pp. 20 and 41. Óðinn introduces himself in the *Qrvar-Odds saga* with the name Jólfr (Boer (ed.) 1892, pp. 68 f.). This Old Norse first name is a contracted form of the compound *Jó-olfr (formed from *jór*, "horse"; cf. Müller 1970, p. 26, note 2; Janzén 1947, p. 83). Falk interprets this name (whose literal meaning is "horse-wolf") as a metaphorical designation of the bear, cf. the first name Jórekr, which is cited as a bear's name in an *Pula*: *Pulur*, IV, cc⁽¹⁾ (*Skj.* A:1, p. 677, B:1, p. 670). This interpretation is also adopted by de Vries 1962, p. 292.

53 Falk 1924, pp. 21 and 41; Jólfrúðr is listed in the *Pulur* as a bear name (*Pulur*, IV, cc¹: *ialfvör*; *Skj.* A:1, p. 677, B:1, p. 670), but also as an Óðinn's name (*Pulur*, IV, jj, 8: *i ø lfq ðr*; *Skj.* A:1, p. 682, B:1, p. 673: *jólfrúðr*). This name is also used as Óðinn's-*heiti* in several *kenningar* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 325). For an etymological study of this term, see de Vries 1962, p. 294 f.

54 Falk 1924, pp. 29 and 41 recalls the bond that connects, the raging god, with the berserkers; *Pulur*, IV, jj, 4 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 681, B:1, p. 673). Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 643 translates as "den fremstormende". Cf. the verb *þrasa*, "to tremble with rage" (which is used in the *Lokasenna*, str. 58 in connection with the god Þórr; on the etymology of the verb cf. de Vries 1962, p. 620).

55 Falk 1924, p. 23; *Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), pp. 10 and 29; *Grímnismál*, Str. 49. Cf. the noun *ómun*, "sound, voice". However, this interpretation is not uncontroversial (cf. the dissenting theses of de Vries 1962, p. 419).

Jólnir⁵⁷ recalls the importance of the cult of Óðinn during the *jól* period, when berserkers often appear (cf. especially *Grettis saga*,⁵⁸ *Svarfisdæla saga*,⁵⁹ *Hrólfs saga kraka*⁶⁰). Gunnblindi⁶¹ and Herblindi⁶² refer to the ability to deprive the enemy of sight during battle: Óðinn instills fear in the enemy while his men (*hans menn*) indulge in *berserks-gangr* (*Ynglinga saga*, ch. VI).

Similarly, the name of the Valkyrie Herfjoturr ("army fetter")⁶³ refers to the paralysis that afflicts Óðinn's victims.⁶⁴ Together with spreading fear among his opponents Óðinn makes his berserkers invulnerable to iron and fire. Among other things, he has the ability to blunt the slashing weapons of the opposing army⁶⁵ as described in stanza 148 of the *Hávamál*.

eggjar ec deifi
minna andscota bítað
þeim vápn né velir.

(I blunt the tips of my
fine shooters,
neither cut their weapons nor their lists.)⁶⁶

Snorri's interpretation, according to which the invulnerability of the berserkers is based on the powers of their deity, is obviously based on an old tradition.

56 Falk 1924, p. 14. These names are formed from the noun *goll*, "noise, loud sound". According to Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, *goll* is also the name of a Valkyrie (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, S. 40). The word is used in several *kenningar* for "fight" (Meissner 1921, p. 187). Cf. also the verb *gjalla*, "to yell, to bellow".

57 Falk 1924, p. 20 f.: Eilífr Goðrúnarson, *Pórsdrápa*, Str. 12 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 150, B:1, p. 142) and *Pulur*, VI, jj, 7 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 682, B:1, p. 673); *Halfdanar þáttur svarta*, p. 564: Óðinn [. . .] heitir [. . .] Jólnir *af þui at þeir drogu þat af iolunum* ("Óðinn . . . is called . . . Jólnir, because they derived it from *jól*"). On the connection between Odin and Yule in the Scandinavian tradition, cf. .g. Lid 1933, p. 143 f.

58 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), pp. 62-71 and 135 ff.

59 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, pp. 142-148.

60 Slay (ed.) 1960, ch. XXIV, pp. 82-86.

61 Falk 1924, p. 14: *Pulur*, IV, jj, 8 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 682, B:1, p. 673).

62 Falk 1924, p. 16: *Pulur*, IV, jj, 5 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 682, B:1, p. 673).

63 Poetic *Edda*: *Grímnismál*, Str. 36; *Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), p. 40.

64 Cf. Dumézil 1959, p. 62 on the Indo-European myth of the "dieu lieur" ("captivating god"), with a comparison between Óðinn and Varuna.

65 The motif of blunted slashing weapons also appears in the Icelandic sagas. However, most of these episodes have no mythological background. Magic and its means usually occupy a central place in these accounts (cf. Dillmann 2006, pp. 61-64). Sometimes berserkers appear in this context: Moldi in the *Svarfisdæla saga* (p. 146) stands out in particular.

66 Krause (transl.) 2004, p. 67.

In the 10th century, the skald Eyvindr Skáldaspillir reports on the connection between the customs of the animal warriors and the cult of Óðinn in the poem *Háleygjatal* (Str. 8):

Ok sá halr⁶⁷ at
Hqars veðri
hqsvan serk
Hrísgrísnis bar.⁶⁸

(And this hero
in the weather of Hqarr
wore the gray skirt
of the wolf).

The figure referred to in this verse shows clear traits of an animal warrior (*úlfheðinn*): He is clad in a "gray wolf's pelt" (*hqss serkr hrísgrísnis*) in battle. The metaphor *Hárs veðr* ('storm of Hár') stands here for 'battle'.⁶⁹ Hár (literally: the 'high one') is one of Óðinn's epithets.⁷⁰ Heinrich Beck has emphasized the similarities between this poetic image and the scene shown on one of the matrices of Torslunda.⁷¹

The image of the one-eyed god accompanied by a warrior in a wolf's pelt is therefore one of the mythological elements most firmly anchored in the culture of ancient Norse from the Vendel Age to the Viking Age. This motif shows a clear proximity to the depiction in the *Ynglinga saga*, in which the *berserksgangr* is attributed to "men", even if Snorri Sturluson, who probably started from a false etymological interpretation of the composition *ber-serkr*, no reference to the wearing of animal furs.

In Snorri's *Edda*, the berserkers appear alongside the ruler of Asgard. In the *Heimskringla*, however, they are obviously described as historical figures: This is the case with Hildibrandr and Haki haðaberserkr in the *Hálfðanar saga svarta*⁷² and with Þórir haklangr, Berðlu-Kári and the berserkers of King Haraldr in the *Haralds saga hárfagra*.⁷³ All these figures belong to the

67 The *heiti halr* (term for a man) is often given a heroic connotation in Old Norse poetry. Cf. e.g. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 224; *IED*, p. 235, where reference is made to æ. *haeled*, an. *hōldr*. Beck 1968a translates this word as "hero".

68 Poole (ed./Übers) 2012, p. 204; cf. *skj.* A:1, P. 69, B:1, 61.

69 Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 599; Meissner 1921, p. 18. The noun *veðr* stands for the wind, here with the differentiation as "gust of wind", "storm".

70 Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 314; Falk 1924, p. 14. Cf. the name *Hár* in *Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 10 f.) and the form *hq* R in *Pulur*, IV, jj, 2 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 681, B:1, p. 672).

71 Beck 1968a, p. 248.

72 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, pp. 90 and 91 f.

73 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, pp. 123, 113 f., 107, 124. A stanza attributed to the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi corresponds there to stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði*.

aristocratic milieu of pagan Norway⁽⁷⁴⁾ For the Christian kings who succeed Haraldr hárfagri, Snorri does not list any berserkers in their retinue⁽⁷⁵⁾

The Norwegian historical sources testify that the animal warriors in the territories that initially resisted the new religion did not disappear immediately: A group of twelve animal warriors⁷⁶ still took up arms at the beginning of the 11th century, they took part in the Battle of Stiklastaðir in the wake of Saint Óláfr's opponents. The Old Norse sources do not use the term *berserkr* or *úlfsheðinn* in connection with these warriors. However, they wear wolf furs (*vargstakkar*, 'wolf coat')⁷⁷ and form a strike force under Þórir hundr. Þórir, whose brother still adheres to pagan customs after his conversion,⁷⁸ is one of the most powerful rulers of Halogaland⁷⁹ - an area in which Christianity was late to establish itself.

74 The social position of three of these people cannot be doubted (Haki haðaberskr, owner of a large part of Hadeland; Berðlu-Kári, who provides Jarl Rognvaldr with a fully equipped ship; Þórir haklangr, who is introduced as the son of the king of Agder). Snorri does not give any precise information about the origin of the berserker Hildibrandr. However, he is so powerful that, surrounded by his eleven companions, he is able to stand up to King Sigurðr hjótr.

75 With the exception of the reign of Ladejarl Hakon the Mighty (Hákon Sigurðarson Hlaðajarl or Hákon inn ríki). Surprisingly, there is no berserker at his side, although his connection to paganism is well documented.

76 Groups of twelve warriors are repeatedly documented in connection with berserkers in the Old Norse tradition (cf. Höfler 1976, pp. 301-304).

77 At least according to the legendary Óláfs *saga* (Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, p. 192). Snorri in turn describes these warriors as wearing reindeer skins (*hreinbjálbi*) made by "Finnish" magicians (Óláfs *saga helga*, pp. 440-441 and 492). Snorri is undoubtedly referring to the tradition of the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, a contemporary witness of the events. One of the stanzas of the *Erfdrápa*, which is quoted in the *Heimskringla*, links Þórir's invulnerability to the magic of the Finns (Óláfs *saga helga*, p. 492). This interpretation certainly suited a Christian skald like Sigvatr (cf. Höfler 1940, p. 112). The topos of Sami magic is also used extensively in Old Norse literature (cf. Strömbäck 1935, p. 198 f.). The contradictory tradition does not allow us to identify the clothing worn by Þórir's men with certainty. Nevertheless, the "wolf furs" seem to fit the epithet of Þórir hundr. Dogs and wolves are not only related in the animal kingdom: They also stem from the same symbolic dimension, be it warlike or religious. To this end, Þórir's companions are sometimes also called by the collective name *hundar* (Óláfs *saga hins helga* [Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982], p. 196; *Flateyjarbók*, 2, p. 356).

78 See chapter VIII below. The final conversion Þórir takes place after the death of the saint Óláfr (Óláfs *saga helga* (Hkr), p. 496). According to the legendary saga Þórir then embarks on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, from which he will never return. One of his descendants again bears the surname *hundr* (*Magnúss saga góða*, chap. XI, p. 23).

79 Óláfs *saga helga* (Hkr), p. 218.

The phenomenon of animal warriors thus seems to have been firmly rooted in the warrior traditions of the ancient north, as well as in the beliefs and pagan rituals.

In his study of concepts of the afterlife and warrior cults in the Old Norse religion, Andreas Nordberg shows connections between the depictions of Valhalla and the values and customs of the social elites of the Viking Age: The image of the *einherjar* gathering around Óðinn is naturally reminiscent of warriors dining with their leader in the hall: 'De mytiska motiven med Valhall bör delvis vara gestaltade efter de religiösa upplevelserna av den kultiska kommunionen med gudarna och de döda i den aristokratiska hallen.'⁸⁰ The cultic community consisting of the beast warriors gathered around their leader was certainly experienced by them in a similar way to the relationship between the god of war and his dead heroes. The Hall of the Lord thus becomes the earthly counterpart of Valhalla. As Jan de Vries writes, the old Norse followers were a "chosen band of warriors" who "entered into a very personal relationship" with their leader and at the same time "the place where . . . the worship of the god Odin had its special place"⁽⁸¹⁾.

Archaeologist Lotte Hedeager points out the close connection between the The book also points to the idea of the afterlife and the organization of centers of power in pre-Christian Scandinavia by presenting the Danish settlement of Gudme as "the paradigmatic model of Asgard"⁽⁸²⁾. This schema can undoubtedly also be applied to other central places, at least until the final conversion to Christianity (schw. "Centrala platser")⁸³, in particular Gamla Uppsala⁽⁸⁴⁾.

The social structure of medieval Iceland appears very different comparison: on this island, where there is neither a jarl nor a king, there is no place for organized warrior bands and berserker groups. François-Xavier Dillmann has summarized this situation as follows

80 Nordberg 2003, p. 290.

81 Cf. de Vries 1970, 2, p. 99 (§ 408: cult of allegiance).

82 Hedeager 2001; 2002, p. 13 f.

83 This concept, which was first developed by the German geographer Walter Christaller and taken up by archaeologists in a modified form, describes a center of power in the context of early or old Nordic culture where several functions and activities come together: seat of power, settlement concentration, economic and cultic activities, production of prestige goods (ring swords, ceremonial helmets) or cultic objects (bracteates, guldgubbers). Cf. e.g. Larsson / Hårdh / Stjernquist 1998; Steuer 2007 with bibliography.

84 Sundqvist 2004a; Sundqvist 2011. The importance of the rulers' seats of the north as cult centers in pre-Christian times is well documented both by rich archaeological evidence, by the geographical concentration of sacred place names and by the later literary tradition. Cf. e.g. Jørgensen 2009 (on Gudme, Helgö, Uppåkra, Sorte Muld, Tissø and Lejre), Niles / Osborn 2007 (on Lejre) or Munch 2003 (on Borg in the Lofoten Islands). On the connection between cult and landscape, cf. .g. Brink 2001.

In summary: "Les conditions politiques et religieuses qu'avaient favorisé la formation ou, à tout le moins, le développement des groupes de berserker en Scandinavie paraissent donc avoir été absentes sur le sol islandais."⁸⁵

With the exception of the *Konungasögur* - the tradition of which is supported by the *Skaldenstrophen* - and a few passages of the *Íslendingasögur* (see Chapter IV above), the figure of the berserker in the Icelandic literary tradition is a stereotypical character who often lacks any historicity. This development can be observed above all within the corpus of the *Fornaldarsögur*, which present the beast warriors in very different contexts. In the context of an examination of all literary motifs associated with the berserkers, the authentic traditional elements must be separated from the commonplaces and purely fabulous elements in order to exclude interpretations of the phenomenon that are based on an insufficiently critical approach to the sources.

85 Dillmann 2006, p. 263.

Chapter VII

The literary figure of the berserker and his stereotypes in the Icelandic sagas

The sources presented in the course of this work represent important evidence. For the most part, they make it possible to place the tradition of the beast warriors in a precise context - that of the Old Norse elites of the 9th and 10th centuries - and thus to shed light on the social organization and religious beliefs of the milieu under investigation.

In the following, the main characteristics with the literary figure of the berserker as well as the variants and developments of this motif in the Icelandic sagas will be analyzed. The focus will be on examining the *Íslendingasögur* and the *Fornaldarsögur*, but without completely neglecting the *Ko-nungasögur*, some of which already been considered in the previous chapters.¹ Within this corpus, the "real" image of animal warriors often disappears behind a collection of stereotypes, most of which lack any historical basis. The aim of this study is to filter out the authentic elements from which the medieval authors gradually developed their topoi.

The first part of this chapter is dedicated to the various roles that berserkers can take on, before going on to discuss the representations of the *berserk gangr*.

A The figure of the berserker, variants and development

As Gerard Breen has already aptly noted: "The berserkr appears in a broad range of narrative roles, many of these contradictory or even mutually self-exclusive."² The sources rarely distinguish between these different roles: Different aspects of the "characteristics" of a beast warrior can be combined in the same work, sometimes even in the same person. Nevertheless, some archetypes can be identified relatively easily, the study of which can shed light on the development of a complex literary tradition.

1 Although the berserkers are mentioned relatively frequently in the *Riddarasögur*, these sources will only rarely be referred to, as they provide little information that a reconstruction of the historical phenomenon. For this reason, the *Rímur* will hardly be considered in the course of this study. On the berserkers in this 'late' genre (the first *rímur* emerged in the 14th century), see above all the references cited in Breen 1999a.

2 Breen 1999a, p. 103.

1 The elite warrior in the service of the powerful

The depiction of this first archetype more or less corresponds to the image that emerges from the skaldic sources of Harald Schönhaar's time: the Berkers, who often appear in small groups, are presented as elite warriors in the service of a king or a powerful ruler, i.e. as members of a retinue.

The *Eyrbyggja saga* mentions two brothers, both beast warriors, who reside at the court of the Swedish king Eiríkr inn sigrsæli.³ These berserkers are passed on from Eiríkr to the Ladejarl Hákon Sigurðarson, whose sphere of power extends over most of Norway in the last decades of the 10th century.

For the description of the two animal warriors, who are called Halli and Leiknir, terms are used that are also found in Snorri Sturluson:⁴

[. . .] þeir gengu berserksgang ok váru þá eigi í mannligu eðli, er þeir váru reiðir, ok fóru galnir sem hundar ok óttuðusk hvárki eld né járn [. . .]⁵

([. . .] they fell into a berserk rage and were not of a human nature when they were brought down, and they began to howl like dogs and neither fire nor iron bit them [. . .])

When the Icelander Vermundr asks Jarl Hákon to leave the two berserkers to him, he is immediately warned:

[. . .] hygg ek, at þeir verði þér stirðir og skapstórir, þegar er þér kaupiz við; hygg ek þat flestum bóndasonum ofrefli, at stýra þeim eða halda hræddum, þó at þeir hafi mér hlýðnir verit í sinni.⁽⁶⁾

([. . .] I think that they will become rebellious and haughty towards you as soon as you deal with them; I think that it is beyond the strength of most farmers' sons to command them or keep them in fear, even if they were obedient to me in their service).

Vermundr's request is to be fulfilled on the condition that he manages to persuade the two brothers to set off with him on board his ship to Iceland. They are not slaves and will not change masters without agreeing to this. Halli and Leiknir accept their fate, but doubt that they will be able to survive on the island.

3 This episode is also recounted in the *Heiðarviga saga* (chapters III and IV). The first chapters of this work, which were destroyed in the fire in Copenhagen in 1728, were reconstructed on the basis of Jón Ólafsson's notes. It is undoubtedly one of the oldest *Íslendingasögur* that has survived to this day (cf. the contribution by Paul Schach in Pulsiano et al. (eds.) 1993, pp. 275 f.).

4 Cf. the phrase *váru galnir sem hundar et hvártki eldr né járn orti á þá* in *Ynglinga saga* (S. 19).

5 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 61.

6 Gering (ed.) 1897, p. 85.

find a leader worthy to serve him (*høfðingja [. . .] er þeim þætti sér hent at þjóna*).⁷

Vermundr, however, neither comes from humble origins nor is he of dubious descent: his ancestors include a jarl and several lords.⁸ He becomes a follower of Jarl Hákon (*gerðiz honum handgenginn*), who takes him in as a friend (*í kærleikum*) and knows that he comes from a noble family (he is referred to as *stórættaðr*). However, his social status corresponds to that of a *bondi*: the Icelandic does not belong to the warlike upper class of Norwe- gen. The berserkers are of the opinion that they humiliate themselves when they enter his service.

Jarl Hákon finally agrees to Vermundr's request, but demands that the two beast warriors be treated appropriately⁽⁹⁾.

This passage clearly shows the esteem in which Berserker was held by the Scandinavian elite - an opinion not shared by the Icelanders. Shortly after their arrival in Iceland, the brothers suffer their first insult. Halli, who is considering marriage, asks Vermundr to find him an honorable match. He replies that no daughter from a good family would consider marrying a berserker.¹⁰ The animal warriors' behavior then turns negative and their new master begins to devise a plan on how best to get rid of them. Vermundr finally hands them over to his brother Arngrímr, called Víga- styrr.¹¹ The berserkers protest against this and refuse to be passed on as mere slaves (*sem ánaudga menn*).¹²

They soon change their minds and publicly declare their preference for Víga-styrr. This turnaround certainly has to do with the pugnacious character of the brother of

7 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 62.

8 For the genealogy of Vermundr, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, pp. 3-6, 10-12, 21. Vermundr belongs to the Kjalleklingar clan, which originated in Norway and is regarded as *mikill ætt* in Iceland. Vermundr's great-grandfather, Björn, had married the daughter of the Jarl Kjallakr of Jämtland and had moved to Iceland after King Haraldr hárfagri had dispossessed him because his father Ketill flatnefr had claimed sovereignty over the Hebrides (*suðreyjar*). In the *Eyrbyggja saga*, Ketill is referred to as ágætr *hersir* ("noble heresy") (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935, p. 3). He had the daughter of Hersen of Romerike. His grandfather Grímr was Herse of Sogn. Vermundr and his ancestors are also known from other sources (including the *Landnámabók*).

9 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 62 f.

10 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 63.

11 In the legal sense, *víg* denotes manslaughter. Arngrímr is known to have committed several murders for which he refuses to pay compensation (*hann vá mörq víg, en bætti engi*; see Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 33). *Styrr* stands for "war",

"Fight". This epithet refers to his character as a man who is "very arrogant and full of injustice" (p. 21: *ofstopamaðr mikill ok fullr ójafnaðar*).

12 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 64.

Vermundr. However, it doesn't take long for the situation to come to a head: After they moved in with Víga-styrr, Halli asks for the hand of his daughter Ásdís in marriage. Her father then decides to get rid of the two of them. To achieve this, he tests them to tests of manhood to prove their strength and makes them perform heroic tasks on his land.¹³ The brothers accept this challenge, although they are used to more heroic tasks, in the hope of gaining Víga-styrr's approval as a reward for their performance. They create an impressive piece of work until exhaustion overcomes them, as is usual for those who have a 'second self'.⁽¹⁴⁾ Víga-styrr takes advantage of Halli and Leiknir's weakness, lures them into a trap and kills them.¹⁵ The bodies are buried under a pile of stones. This practice is reserved in ancient Iceland for certain criminals, enemies whom one wishes to humiliate beyond death, and malevolent beings who are believed to return after death.⁽¹⁶⁾ 'Several people who are seized by the *berserksgangr* actually appear after their death in the form of a ghost. These include above all Klaufi in the *Svarfdœla saga*,⁽¹⁷⁾ Þráinn in the *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*¹⁸ and Agnarr in the *Gull-Póris saga*.¹⁹)

Where does this disdain for animal warriors by Icelanders come from? This prejudice blatantly contradicts the position of the elite warriors among the Scandinavian rulers - at least among those who resisted the growing influence of Christianity.

In the case of Halli and Leiknir, the great Icelandic families show no understanding of their way of life, which mainly focused on warlike activities. The berserkers have no wealth, as Halli himself admits.²⁰ In the eyes of the Icelandic rich, the beast warriors are nothing but ruffians and show-offs.

Depending on the circumstances of their travels and their interests, even the most prominent Icelanders are not averse to entering the service of a Scandinavian ruler in order to bolster their reputation and strengthen their network of contacts.

13 The path created by the berserkers and the wall they built from lava stones have survived to modern times (cf. above all Kålund 1877, p. 433). The author of the saga confirms, among other things, that the wall was still visible at the time the text was written (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935, p. 72).

14 The author of the saga uses here (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935, p. 74) uses the expression *eigi einhamr*, literally "the one who possesses not only a *hamr*, a form" (cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 245 f.).

15 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, pp. 70-75.

16 Cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 548 f., especially p. 550, note 10 and p. 556 f., notes 44 and 45.

17 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, pp. 175-183 and 207. For further references to this motif, see Breen 1999a, pp. 144-147.

18 Rafn (ed.) 1829, pp. 368-371.

19 Kålund (ed.) 1898, ch. XVIII, p. 9 ff.

20 Cf. the expression *eigi festerkir* in: Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 71.

ken. However, they ignore simple warriors like Halli and Leiknir, devoted their lives as adventurers entirely to war. Their status is reminiscent of the elite warriors of the Chatti people, of whom Tacitus reports that they owned neither house nor land, but were fed and maintained by the rest of the population (*Germania*, XXXI).²¹ Such behavior was bound to provoke the displeasure of the Icelandic population, who did not see the need to maintain a force of this kind.

However, not all berserkers necessarily spend their entire lives in the service of a ruler. The sources mention some Norwegian aristocrats who lead an adventurous, warlike life for several years before returning to their estates (see above, chap. IV on Kveld-Úlfr and Berðlu-Kári in the *Egils saga*).²² The composition of the berserker groups thus shows great similarities with that of the *comitatus*, as described by Tacitus (*Germania*, XIII): This includes young men of noble birth as well as older and battle-hardened companions of whom they need not be ashamed.²³ These *comites* are not recruited exclusively from the same people (*nec solum in sua gente*), but can also come from neighboring peoples. Evidence of this can still be found in the Viking Age, such as Halli and Leiknir, who come from Sweden and enter the service of the Ladejarl Hákon.

The Old Norse sources therefore refer to an authentic tradition when they describe the berserkers as members of a retinue. The *Eyrbyggja saga* provides convincing evidence of this.

This work also reveals the development that the berserker had to undergo on Icelandic soil. While at the court of the Scandinavian rulers he still played the central role in the military retinue, the beast warrior was later unable to fit into the Icelandic social system. He is perceived as a parasite, a dangerous outsider whose main activity is to challenge a respected *bóndi* (free peasant) to a duel in order to seize his wife or daughter²⁴ or to take over his wife or daughter.

21 *Germania*, p. 89: *Nulli domus aut ager aut aliqua cura: prout ad quemque uenere, aluntur, prodigi alieni, contemptores sui, donec exsanguis senectus tam durae uirtuti in pares faciat.* ("None of them has a house or a farm or any other duties; whoever they visit, they let themselves be entertained by, depending on the circumstances; they are prodigals of other people's goods and despisers of their own, until their feeble old age makes them incapable of being such rough warriors.") (Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 47). Their abilities as elite warriors are well documented; during the battle they form the first line of battle. Cf. Neumann / Jungandreas / von Petrikovits / Mildenerberger 1981.

22 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 3 f.

23 *Germania*, p. 78 f.: *Insignis nobilitas aut magna patrum merita principis dignationem etiam adulescentulis adsignant; ceteris robustioribus ac iam pridem probatis adgregantur, nec rubor inter comites aspici.* ("High descent or great merits of the fathers also procure very young people the favor of a suitor; they are added to the others who are already stronger and have long since acquired. Nor is it a disgrace to appear among the retainers.") (Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 21 f.).

24 This literary motif was examined in detail by Blaney 1982, pp. 279-294.

to claim their fortune.²⁵Traces of a literary stereotype can be observed in the *Eyrbyggja saga*: Many berserker stories are told in the old Icelandic sagas in order to the character of a hero in a good light through the actions of the animal warriors, who are defeated through courage or cunning.

The author of *Eyrbyggja saga* probably did not invent the adventures of Halli and Leiknir, as they are already mentioned in the first chapters of *Heiðarvíga saga* - one of the oldest surviving Icelandic sagas.²⁶Consequently, *Eyrbyggja saga* is not a primary source for this episode. Nevertheless, it provides valuable information about the fate of the berserkers in the last decades before the year 1000: even though the beast warriors were respected among the followers of the pagan Ladejarl Hákon Sigurðarson, they encountered resistance from the Icelandic peasants on the other side of the sea.

In the *Eyrbyggja saga* there is no other reference to the *berserksgangr* apart from the episode of Halli and Leiknir. However, one of the names in the text is reminiscent of the beast warrior naming tradition. The saga reports that among the first Norwegian settlers to come to Iceland was a certain Úlfarr kappi.⁽²⁷⁾who is also mentioned in the *Landnámabók* and according to it originally came from Halogaland.²⁸According to this source, Úlfarr was part of the retinue of his compatriot Geirrǫðr, who gave him neighboring land in Iceland: No doubt Úlfarr had led the life of a warrior associated with Geirrǫðr in the preceding years. Old and without descendants, Úlfarr accepted the challenge of an opponent who had set himself the goal of robbing him of his land, and was defeated in this battle.

The connection between the name Úlfarr and the byname kappi seems particularly revealing. According to Gunter Müller, the Old Norse Úlfarr comes from the Germanic *Wulfa-harjaz,²⁹whereby the word element *harjaz* denotes the army (an. *herr*).³⁰The first part of the compound naturally corresponds to the wolf. The ap- pellative *kappi* can be translated as "comb" and stands for a warrior of outstanding value. This term is sometimes used in other sources in connection with

25 On the Holmgang laws (*hólmgöngulög*), which the berserkers sometimes insist on in the Icelanders' gas, see especially *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 205. This episode can be regarded as *locus classicus*.

26 For the state of preservation of this work, which was partially reconstructed after the destruction of the manuscript, see footnote 757 above.

27 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, pp. 11 and 13 f.

28 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1900, pp. 32 f., 153 f., 238, 260. The tradition of animal warriors still exists in this region in the 11th century with the companions of Þórir hundr (cf. the various versions of the *Óláfs saga helga*).

29 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 131, note 59.

30 Cf. as. Wulfhere; for other possible interpretations of the element *-arr* see Janzén 1947, pp. 99-102 (i. a. from the Uro-Nordic *-gaiRaR*, "spear", cf. as. Wulfgár; this form also refers to a martial context).

used with persons who are introduced as berserkers⁽³¹⁾ (cf. the twelve companions of Hrólfr kraki, who are referred to as *berserkir* in the *Snorra Edda*,³² but as *kappar* in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*;³³ cf. also the legendary *Óláfs saga*, in which the following expression is used in connection with Gauka-Þórir³⁴ and Afrafasti: *þeir varo kappar miklir [. . .] oc varo nalega bærsærkir* - "They were great fighters [. . .] and almost berserkers").³⁵

In the Icelandic sagas, there are many first names based on the element *-úlfr-*. Such a name alone is hardly sufficient to identify an animal warrior. In the case of Úlfarr kappi, however, the social status and his epithet suggest a deliberate reference to the tradition of beast warriors. The absence of the term *berserkr* in both sources in which this figure appears does not reduce the likelihood of this thesis: in the extensive corpus of Icelandic sagas, the beast warriors are not always referred to as such (cf. above all Þórir hundr and his companions in the *Óláfs saga helga*). Rather, other references reveal their true nature (behavior, appearance, epithets, etc.).

On the contrary, the word *berserkr* refers to very diverse figures: from a purely literary point of view, the topos of the elite warrior is just one stereotype of many. From a historiographical point of view, the image of the berserker as an elite warrior, which plays an important role in the *Konungasögur* and in *somegur*, is the most likely.

Incidentally, the motif can also be in some prehistoric sagas. In the *Hrólfs saga kraka*, the twelve berserkers of the Swedish king Aðils are charged with defending the land (*váru þeir honum til landvarnar*).³⁶ The Danish king Hrólfr kraki, Aðils' opponent, also has a group of twelve beast warriors in addition to his twelve 'warriors'.³⁷ Aðils' berserkers are led by the

31 At this point, however, it seems impossible to follow Kuhn's conclusions (1968, pp. 218-227). Since the term *berserkr* is replaced several times in the sources by the word *kappi*, which, like ahd. *kempfo* or as. *cempa* lat. *campio*, Kuhn regards the tradition of Berserker as an Old Norse imitation of the Roman gladiators (in an as. gloss around 700, *cempa* translates lat. *gladiator*). Kuhn thus ignores cultic and mythological aspects emphasized by Höfler (1934, p. 323 f.; Höfler 1976).

32 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 140.

33 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 100. Among the twelve warriors, Bǫðvarr Bjarki seems to be the great enemy of the berserkers.

34 The reading *Gautaporer* appears in the manuscript of the Legendary Saga.

35 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 176.

36 Slay (ed.) 1960, p. 33.

37 Slay (ed.) 1960, pp. 49, 73-79, 82-85 (cf. also the *Bjarkarímur*, pp. 134-145). According to Olrik (1903a, pp. 201-222), King Hrólfr's berserkers are not part of the original version of the story.

Svipdagr⁽³⁸⁾ while those of King Hrólfr are rendered harmless by Bǫðvarr bjarki. Bǫðvarr, however, belongs to the group of Hrólfr's twelve "combs", which in the *Snorra Edda* - in contrast to *Hrólfs saga kraka*³⁹ or the *Bjarkarímur*⁴⁰ - are also referred to as *berserkir*.⁴¹

Based on the text of the *Hrólfs saga kraka*, it is of course not possible to reconstruct an exact picture of the berserkers of the Viking Age, even though this work passes on very old saga motifs. Although it is certain that the 15th century version was written relatively late⁴², the version we have is based on much older material known to both Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus⁽⁴³⁾.

Similar personal names also occur in Anglo-Saxon poetry (*Beowulf* and *Widsith*).⁴⁴ These sources probably contain traces of events that took place in Scandinavia during the 5th or 6th century. The name given to the beast warriors in the various areas of the north at this time is unknown. Nevertheless, the existence of beast warriors in the vicinity of the Swedish or Danish Vendelian rulers is not unlikely. This thesis is supported by at least one archaeological find from Sweden: the matrices from Torslunda⁽⁴⁵⁾.

38 Slay (ed.) 1960, pp. 33-45. In the *Bjarkarímur*, Hvitserkr resists the berserkers (pp. 147- 152).

39 Slay (ed.) 1960, pp. 85-125.

40 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1904, pp. 145, 152-163.

41 Among King Hrólfr's twelve berserkers, Snorri mentions the names of Bǫðvarr, Hjalti, Hvít-serkr, Véseti, Vǫttr, Svipdagr and Beigaðr (cf. Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 140).

42 The work belonged to the collection of the Icelandic monastery Möðruvellir in 1461. The oldest manuscripts that still exist today date from no earlier than the 17th century.

43 Hrólfr appears under the name Rolpho in the *Gesta Danorum* (II, v, 6; II, vi-viii; III, iii, 1). Snorri mentions King Hrólfr in the *Ynglinga saga* (pp. 55 ff. and 68) and in the *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, pp. 139-142). The epithet *kraki* also appears in the *Hátta Valley* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 251). Other sources also refer to the story of Hrólfr kraki - including the *Chronicum Lethrense* and the *Skjöldunga saga* (one of the oldest sagas, probably written in the 12th century. The work no longer in its original form. Based on this text, Arngrímur Jónsson wrote a Latin summary in the 16th century, which has been preserved under the title *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta*). A 14th century manuscript (*AM 415 4to*, Langfeðgatal) connects the genealogy of Hrólfr with Óðinn (cf. Evans 1993).

44 In both poems, Hrólfr goes by the name Hrǫpwulf. On the connection between the Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon traditions, see, among others, Olson 1916; von Sydow 1923; Gräslund 2018.

45 Cf. Bruce-Mitford 1968, plate XVI, image IV. The four matrices found on the Swedish island of Öland, which probably used to make helmet ornaments, are dated to the 6th or 7th century (cf. Beck 1968a, p. 237).

Despite its limited historicity, *Hrólfs saga kraka* preserves the memory of an archaic, pre-Christian form of allegiance in which animal warriors were closely associated with the function of ruler. Although the berserkers in this work are also portrayed with negative character traits that correspond to the late stereotypes of Old Icelandic literature,⁴⁶ there are several other motifs in *Hrólfs saga kraka* that are in all likelihood on an older, authentic tradition. The challenges that the berserkers of Aðils and Hrólfr hurl at the guests in their leader's hall, for example, may ancient martial rituals performed during *the jól period*.⁴⁷ Equally noteworthy is the fact that the berserkers form small groups of twelve warriors each, both in Aðils' hall and at King Hrólfr's court.

In the sagas, the motif of the twelve companions very often appears in conjunction with the twelve sons of Arngrimr in the *Heiðreks saga*⁽⁴⁸⁾ a typical example of this. The description of the fury that befalls them⁵⁰ and their final battle on the island of Sámsey⁵¹ are among the most famous saga motifs in Old Norse literature. In the *Víga-Glúms saga*, the animal warrior Björn járnhauss and his eleven companions appear during the *dí- sablót* at the beginning of winter.⁵² In the *Grettis saga* (ch. XIX), twelve animal warriors disrupt the *jól festivities*.⁵³ A similar episode takes place in the *Svarfdæla saga* (ch. VII).⁵⁴ In the *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, Sigurðr hjörtr kills the berserker Hildibrand and his eleven companions (*Hildibrand berserk [. . .] ok þá xii saman*).⁵⁵

The motif of the twelve berserkers is also in the description of some historical events. According to the *Egils saga*, Haraldr hárfagri is killed at the battle of the

46 Despite their ferocity and complacency, they are ridiculed as soon as the hero opposes them and puts an end to their impunity. This motif is clearly a literary commonplace.

47 This motif also appears in the *Svarfdæla saga*, chapter VII.

48 For a list of the most significant occurrences of this motif, see Boberg 1966, p. 124 f. (F610.3.3, F610.3.4.1.). In Old Norse literature, however, the widespread motif of the twelve companions very often occurs in other contexts. Furthermore, the berserker groups do not always consist of twelve warriors. The number twelve also has a special significance in religious beliefs, as evidenced by the myth of the twelve *díar* in the *Ynglinga saga*.

49 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 4: *allir uoru þeir berserkir*.

50 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 5: *En þat var siðvenja, þá er þeir váru með sínum mönnum einum, at þá er þeir fundu, at berserksgangr kom at þeim, fóru þeir á land upp ok brutuz við skóga eða stóra steina, því at þeim hafði þat orðit, at þeir hefðu drept menn sína ok hroðit skip sín*.

51 Cf. Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, pp. 7 f. and 96 f; *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892), pp. 49 f.

52 *Víga-Glúms saga* (Turville-Petre (ed.) 1960), p. 9 ff. On the *dísablót*, cf. de Vries 1970, 1, p. 455 f.; 2, p. 297 f.

53 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 63 f.

54 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 142 f.

55 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 90.

Hafrsfjörð accompanied by twelve berserkers (*berserkir konungs tólf váru í sǫxum*).⁵⁶ Olaf the Saint's opponents include eleven warriors clad in wolf's furs, who precede the army led by Þórir hundr on the battlefield of Stiklastaðir (*Þorer hundr oc þæir xij. saman ero firir utan fylcingarnar oc lausir oc varo i vargskinzstakcum*).⁵⁷

Outside the Old Norse sources, groups of twelve warriors also appear in the *Gesta* of Saxo Grammaticus (V, i, 3 - iii, 16: the twelve sons of Westmarus; VII, ii, 11: the twelve warriors of Harthbenus; VI, ii, 1-10: the twelve Norse brothers of Haldanus, of whom Saxo mentions by name: Gerbiorn, Gunbiorn, Arinbiorn, Stenbiorn, Esbiorn, Thorbiorn and Biorn - cf. an. *björn*, "bear"). The behavior of these figures is clearly reminiscent of that of animal warriors. Otto Höfler⁵⁸ has echoes of this tradition in the Scandinavian, Alemannic and Bavarian⁵⁹ folk traditions: Some brotherhoods or oath associations, which disguise themselves with masks and furs, consist a certain number of members - twelve or 16, as in the case of the Swedish *Öja-busar*. The latter were still active in Södermannland in the 18th century and wore reindeer-skin costumes; Höfler points out that *buse* still referred to a "disguised man" or a "wolf" in the 19th century.⁶⁰ Such customs seem to be firmly anchored in the imagination of the Germanic peoples.

Despite its legendary content, the *Hrólfs saga kraka* thus seems to reflect very old, authentic traditions that were associated with the beast warriors in pre-Christian Scandinavia. In many other texts, which also belong to the genre of prehistoric sagas, the berserkers are also described as elite warriors in the service of the rulers. It is beyond the scope of this work to provide a systematic comparison. However, some works that are among the most important *Fornaldarsögur* are worth here. In the *Gautreks saga*⁶¹, the kings of Uppsala have a group of

56 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 22.

57 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 192.

58 Höfler 1940, p. 113 f., note 60; Höfler 1976, p. 303.

59 Cf. Wackenagel 1959, p. 255. The Perchten in Bavaria traditionally appear in dozens (cf. Waschnitius 1913, p. 58).

60 Cf. Dybeck 1865; 1875; Erixon 1921, p. 123; Dencker 1949; Höfler 1952a, p. 394 f. (see especially p. 305, note 133 on the number of conspirators), p. 307, 316, 324 f. The leader of the Öja-Busar, who had their hideout within a ring wall at Lake Hjälmår, was referred to as *kung*. Höfler compares the "ring fortress" of the Busar with the Norwegian ring fortress of the twelve brothers of Haldanus near Saxo, which bear bear names. Near Öja there is a Viking Age rune stone depicting a bearded man's head (Sö 86,, Västernorr socken; cf. Brate / Wessén 1924/1936, 1, p. 62, 2, pl. 9 and 43). According to a local oral tradition, which was still widespread in the 19th century, this bearded man was referred to as the "father of the Bussar" (*Bussfar*) (whether this figure is to be regarded as a representation of Þórr or Christ is disputed in modern research). According to the text of the runic inscription, this monument was by two brothers, Ásmundr and Freybjörn, to their father Herbjörn.

61 Ranisch (ed.) 1900, p. 32 f.

twelve berserkers, who are called *málamenn*, "mercenaries" (literally "men who receive a wage", cf. an. *máli*). According to the *Fornkonunga saga*⁶², a group of beast-warriors joins the army of Haraldr hilditǫnn and takes part in the battle of Brávellir under a 'shieldmaiden' (an. *skjaldmær*) named Heiðr.⁶³ In the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (chap. III), King Eiríkr of Gästrikland commands several berserkers who fight in the front line of the army (*Berserkir Eireks konungs gengu fyrir fylkingar fram*).⁶⁴ Also in the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, King Hálfðan, ruler of Garðaríki, surrounds himself with twelve beast warriors.⁶⁵

In Icelandic literature, however, the berserker is not always described as the companion of an important personage. He can also act on his own initiative and then usually practises various forms of highway robbery. He is thus described with the characteristics of a Viking or, even more frequently, as a professional duelist.

2 The Viking and the Holmgang Man (*hólmgöngumaðr*)

In many Old Icelandic sources, the word *berserkr* is replaced by the term *vikingr*. However, the two terms can also be used side by side, as for example *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (ch. XVII): *Skati hafði verið berserkr ok hinn mesti vikingr* (ch. XVII).⁶⁶

Moldi is depicted in the *Svarfdæla saga* both as a Viking and as a "half animal warrior" (*vikingr eðr hálfberserkr*)⁶⁷ – the latter expression in particular seems strange, as his behavior leaves no doubt as to his true nature.

The term *vikingr*, which can have both positive and negative connotations in the Old Norse sources,⁶⁸ usually refers to participation in sea voyages, which also included plundering and sea raids.⁶⁹ Such undertakings are not dishonorable for a Scandinavian warrior from the end of the 9th century. The Swedish Jarl Herrǫðr, for example, takes Moldi and his eleven companions well and reserves a place for each of them in the

62 Bjarni Guðnason (ed.) 1982, p. 62.

63 The possible historicity or purely legendary character of this battle is the subject of heated debate among researchers. Cf. Landolt 1999a, p. 646 f.

64 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 243.

65 Rafn (ed.) 1830, ch. XVI, p. 114.

66 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 431.

67 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 142.

68 For the use of this term in Old Norse epigraphic and literary sources, see Krüger 2008.

69 Cf. f. *viking*, "Viking voyage", as well as the expressions *liggja í viking* and *fara í viking*. In principle, however, m. *vikingr* ("Viking", "buccaneer", "pirate") can be used "both in relation to battles fought on land and in a maritime context" (Krüger 2008, p. 62).

Near the high seat: *Jarl lét autt tólf manna rúm utar fra qndvegi*.⁷⁰ Even if this tribute probably more out of fear than respect, this detail makes clear the privileges that the berserkers can claim for themselves in an aristocratic environment.

Viking voyages are also part of the youth of a beast warrior of significant lineage in the *Egils saga*; they are mentioned here in connection with the Norwegian Kveld-Úlfr (*er hann var á unga aldri, lá hann í vikingu ok herjaði*).⁷¹ His ally Berðlu-Kári also has the reputation of a berserker.⁷² Sea raids are among the main activities of some beast warriors. Some of them set up hideouts on islands,⁷³ such as the twelve Norwegian raiders mentioned in Saxo Grammaticus, the brothers of Haldanus: between two raids, Biorn and his brothers retreat behind the ramparts of their fortress (VI, ii, 2).

Other berserkers rage in the interior of the country and make the forests of Norwe- gen unsafe. In the *Grettis saga*⁷⁴, the leader of the *markamenn* (raiders, those outside the law, forest-goers, literally 'men of the forest', cf. an. *mørk*, 'forest') is none other than the beast warrior Snækolfr.⁷⁵ This terrifying figure suddenly appears during the *jól* festivities, where he is defeated by Grettir. The latter already has experience in fighting berserkers, having already defeated the twelve companions of Þórir þǫmb from Halogaland in the course of the previous winter.⁷⁶

These two episodes are by the use of the same literary motif: The berserkers appear to *jól*; they the opponent, whose daughter or property they want to gain, to a duel, but are prevented from doing so by the unexpected appearance of a hero.

This preference of the berserkers for *the jól period* is probably based on an ancient tradition. Certain customs carried out during the winter solstice in the form of wild masked processions have been documented in the Germanic world since the High Middle Ages. The wearing of animal masks,

70 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 143.

71 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 3.

72 Cf. also *Haralds saga hárfagra*, p. 114.

73 Breen (1999a, pp. 27 and 112) assumes that such a refuge existed on the Brenneyjar (in the south of Sweden at the mouth of the Götaälv): In *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 121, this archipelago is mentioned as an important Viking retreat (*vikin- gabæli mikit*) and in *Brot af Þórðar sǫgu hreðu* (p. 234) the berserker Bárekr Brenneyjarfaxi is depicted as the ruler of Brenneyjar.

74 Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, p. 135.

75 In the *Grettis saga*, he is also referred to as a Viking.

76 Considering that Þórir hundr and his eleven fur-clad companions who took part in the Battle of Stiklastaðir came from Halogaland, the tradition of animal warriors in this Norwegian region seems to have lasted until the 11th century (cf. Óláfs *saga helga*).

especially during the first days of the new year, is one of the practices condemned Theodore of Tarsus (England, 7th century) in his penitential writing.⁷⁷ A Byzantine text of the 10th century (*De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* by Constantine Porphyrogennetos⁷⁸) describes the "Gothic" dance (τὸ Γοθικόν). A 10th century *Byzantine text* (*De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* by Constantine Porphyrogennetos) describes the "Gothic" dance (τὸ ΓΟΤΘΙΚΟΝ), which two masked groups of warriors dressed in furs perform before the emperor shortly after Christmas.⁷⁸ In later popular tradition, these customs are still known both in the north and in German-speaking countries⁷⁹. Young people join together in winter, organize masked processions and parade noisily through the area.⁸⁰ As Jan de Vries notes with reference to the Perchten processions of the Alpine countries, "all kinds of mischief is added to this, which is played on the people they meet"⁽⁸¹⁾.

In pre-Christian Norse religion, the *jól period* is closely connected with the cult of the god Óðinn.⁸² Snorri Sturluson, for his part, emphasizes the connection between Óðinn and the *berserksgangr* (see chapter VI above). The behavior attributed to the beast warriors in the sagas is undoubtedly based on very old traditions.

In the *Svarfdœla saga* (Chapter VII), Moldi challenges the Jarl Herrǫðr, whose daughter he ostensibly wants to marry, but also expresses his respect for the sacredness of the *jól period*: When the Norwegian Þorsteinn opposes the berserker as Herrǫðr's representative, the latter agrees to face his opponent three nights after *jól*, but refuses to fight before that day so as not to "desecrate the sacred time of the gods" (*ekki vil ek spilla goðahelginni*).⁸³

⁷⁷ Quoted in de Vries 1970, 1, p. 495.

⁷⁸ *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae* ch. XCII (Vogt (ed.) 1939, 2/1, p. 181 f.). It is possible that this dance preserves Germanic traditions that were incorporated into Byzantine court ceremonial. However, considering the time in which this text was written, the people described cannot be identified as Goths. It is possible that they were Scandinavian mercenaries (who had existed in Byzantium since the 9th century, long before the emergence of the Varangian Guard towards the end of the following century). According to Constantine, the dancers beat their shields and sang ΤΟῦΛΑ, ΤΟῦΛΑ! This onomatopoeic paraphrase has been interpreted several times as a distortion of the Old Norse *jól*. On these questions, see above all Kraus 1895; Sjöberg 1907; Wolfram 1935-1938, pp. 209 f.; de Vries 1970, 1, pp. 452 f.; Gunnell 1995, pp. 66-76.

⁷⁹ Cf. Wolfram 1937 and Eike 1980. Several researchers have compared these folk traditions with the ancient German tradition of the manic mythology; see above all de Vries 1970, 1, p. 496 f. (§ 335, the Julum trains); Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 58 f.; Höfler 1934, p. 16 f. ("Zeitliche Gebundenheit des Dämonentreibens"). Cf. also Meuli 1933; Wackernagel 1959, p. 247 f.

⁸⁰ Youth alliances also play an important role in the context of the various Indo-European mythologies (cf. Dumézil 1939, p. 85 f.; Das / Meiser 2002).

⁸¹ Cf. de Vries 1970, 1, p. 451 (§ 308, the Yule festival). On the Perchten processions, cf. e.g. Andree-Eysn 1905 and 1910.

⁸² Jólnir is one of Óðinn's names; cf. Falk 1924, p. 20 f.

⁸³ Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 144.

In the *Grettis saga*, the berserkers again show no qualms about crossing swords during the *jól festivities*. They are rather surprised to have to fight at all: The fear they evoke usually nips any resistance in the bud. The literary motif of the duel, no doubt inserted into the narrative to emphasize Grettir's heroism, occupies a central place in the plot.

The Grettis saga, set at the beginning of the 11th century, reports on the decision of Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson to ban duels and animal warriors (see chapter III above).⁸⁴ In this text, berserkers are equated with highwaymen (*úthlaupsmenn*) and plunderers (*ránsmenn*) who challenge "outstanding men" (*göfgir menn*) to a duel before seizing their property or their wives.

Around the year 1000, the status of the beast warriors therefore no longer seems desirable. The reception they now received in no way comparable to the reception they had received in the royal halls in the days of Haraldr hárfagri. In all likelihood, this decline can be attributed to the progressive Christianization of the Norwegian upper class. Snorri Sturluson does indeed mention that Jarl Eiríkr and his brother Sveinn to the new faith. However, he makes it clear that these rulers granted their countrymen certain freedoms: "As long as they ruled over Norway, they let everyone have it their Christianity, and they kept the old laws and all the customs of the land" (*meðan þeir réðu fyrir Nóregi, létu þeir gera hvern, sem vildi, um krist- niðaldit, en forn lög heldu þeir vel ok alla landz-siðu*).⁸⁵

Despite his tolerance, however, Jarl Eiríkr could no longer allow the machinations of the berserkers any room. The beast warriors, who were so obviously connected to the pagan cults, no longer had a place in the direct environment of a Christian ruler.

From the 11th century onwards, the old feudal system - possibly under the influence of Anglo-Saxon models - underwent a profound development in both Norway and Denmark, in the course of which many archaic structures disappeared and new feudal relationships between the rulers and the members of their followers emerged⁸⁶.

84 Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, p. 61. According to the *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, dueling was abolished in Iceland by the country's highest court around 1000 (p. 95). On duels in ancient Iceland, see also Keyser 1854 and 1868; Jones 1932 and 1933; Ciklamini 1963 and 1965; Sieg 1966; Bø 1968; Byock 1993b; Hermann Pálsson / Würth 1995; Beck 2000; Wetzler 2014.

85 *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Hkr), p. 459.

86 Cf. Kuhn 1956. The conclusion of this important article, which suffers in part from a hypercritical approach, requires extensive differentiation. The Gefolgschaft was certainly known in the period between the Old Germanic *comitatus* and the medieval *hirð*, despite the author's opinion to the contrary. A more balanced summary of this topic is provided by Lindow 1976.

the memory of the old beliefs still remained alive in the culture of the upper classes - as the continued existence of certain mythological themes in Old Norse poetry clearly proves. However, the tradition of the berserkers, which could not be reconciled with Christian mores, was no longer accepted.

An examination of the sources shows that even within the same source there can be quite different conceptions of the berserkers: In the *Vatnsdæla saga* or the *Grettis saga*, the beast warriors are described on the one hand as elite warriors (who take part in the battle in the Hafrsfjord),⁸⁷ but on the other hand also as freebooters and plunderers.⁸⁸

In fact, both roles can be reconciled, and for a long time they even coexisted: piracy has certainly been a recognized *modus operandi* among the northern Germanic tribes since ancient times. This activity was not abolished after the Christianization of the north, and even Olaf the Saint is reported to have been on a Viking voyage during his youth. However, the conversion of the Norwegian rulers to Christianity deprived the beast warriors of any legitimacy for their deeds and banished them to the fringes of society.

Another piece of evidence supports this thesis. In the Icelandic sagas, Berserkers are often reported as coming from areas that resisted final Christianization for a long time, such as Sweden or Halogaland.

With the exception of the warrior league led by Þórir hundr, which is mentioned in *Óláfs saga helga*, no more beast warriors are found in the vicinity of the mighty from the 11th century onwards. Although several small groups continue to exist in isolation under the leadership of local leaders (such as Snækollr in the *Grettis saga*), their actions, which denied any heroic character in the sources, increasingly resemble the behavior of ordinary highwaymen.

In Iceland, such warriors were never accepted (cf. Halli and Leiknir in the *Eyrbyggja saga*). This also explains the negative image that the berserkers have in many sagas as "professional duelists". In this role, the beast warriors invoke the "laws of holmgang" (*hólmqongulog*)⁸⁹ to assert their claims.

87 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24 f.

88 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, pp. 124 f.; Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, pp. 61 and 135.

89 The duel seems to have been a legal means of enforcing one's rights in the old North (cf. Beck 2000, p. 79: "The Holmgang could . . . initiate a legal action or interrupt the legal action at a certain point in its course"; cf. also Heusler 1911). Egill Skalla-Grímsson resorts to this before the Gulaping to claim his inheritance from Atli (see Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 208). In the course of the ensuing duel, Egill fights with a ferocity similar to that of the berserkers: When he is unable to injure his opponent's shoulders with his sword, he lunges at him and tears open his neck with his teeth (p. 209 f.). Immediately after his victory, Egill kills with his bare hands

If they win, they receive their opponent's property or the hand of woman they have chosen⁽⁹⁰⁾.

The *Egils saga* records a classic form of these "laws" (ch. LXIV),⁹¹ which Ljótr hinn bleiki uses to woo a young woman of noble descent for himself. The terms to describe this intrusive behaviour clearly characterize Ljótr's status: "he is a berserker and a holmgang man" (*hann er berserkr ok holmgongumaðr*).⁹² His activity allows him to amass a large fortune:

Hann hafði [. . .] aflat sér fjár á holmgöngum. Hann hafði felld marga góða bændr ok skorat áðr á þá til holmgöngu ok til jarða þeira ok, var þá orðinn stórauðigr bæði at löndum ok lausum aurum.⁹³

(He had procured [. . .] wealth through logging. He had killed many good farmers and had previously challenged them for their land and property, and he had become very rich both in land and in loose property).

Other Icelandic sagas report similar procedures. The stake of a duel is usually a woman. The berserker challenges either an old man (such as the farmer Einarr in *the Grettis saga*) or a very young man (the *lendr maðr* Friðgeirr in the *Egils saga*), who is then replaced by the hero of the saga. The battle usually ends with the death of the beast warrior, and the victor is often equipped with an extraordinary weapon (such as Þorsteinn in *Svarfdæla saga* or Egill with the sword *Dragvandill*). Benjamin Blaney has examined several passages containing this literary motif in his work entitled "The berserk suitor"⁽⁹⁴⁾.

The *Íslendingasögur* as well as the *Fornaldarsögur* contain a considerable number of scenes based on this model (cf. above all *Egils saga*,⁹⁵ *Droplaugarsona saga*,⁹⁶ *Flóamanna saga*,⁹⁷ *Grettis saga*,⁹⁸ *Gísla saga Súrssonar*,⁹⁹

the sacrificial bull (*blómaut*) that brought to the battlefield. On the question of the dimension of the holmgang associated with the traditional animal sacrifice, cf. e.g. Lundberg 1946.

90 The expression "Berserche rætt", which occurs in Arngrímur Jónsson, possibly refers to this practice (*Ad catalogum regum Sveciæ annotanda*, Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1950, S. 459).

91 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 205.

92 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 201.

93 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 206.

94 Blaney 1982; see also Grimstad 1972.

95 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, pp. 201-206.

96 Jón Jóhannesson (ed.) 1950, p. 178 f.

97 Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991, p. 259 ff.

98 Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, pp. 135-137.

99 Björn K. Þórólfsson / Guðni Jónsson (eds.) 1943, pp. 4 ff. and 5-11.

Gríms saga loðinkinna,¹⁰⁰ *Heiðreks saga*,¹⁰¹ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*,¹⁰² *Svarfdæla saga*,¹⁰³ *Víga-Gríms saga*¹⁰⁴ . Similar events also take place in the *Riddarasögur*.¹⁰⁵ Heinz Dehmer¹⁰⁶ and Gerd Sieg¹⁰⁷ have attempted to reconstruct the structure of this type. The sequence of events and certain descriptive elements can be found in many texts in a comparable way: The berserker makes his claims, which are accompanied by an invitation to a duel; a brave hero, unmoved by the beast warrior's demonstration of power, takes up the victim's cause and accepts the challenge; the fight ends with the berserker being slain despite his supposed invulnerability.

Beyond the literary significance, it cannot be ruled out that this narrative scheme is reminiscent of ancient customs: the abduction of women is one of the types of plundering that Vikings regularly carried out.

The lifelong celibacy demanded by some of these warrior alliances naturally encouraged such debauchery. Recall the customs that Tacitus describes for the ancient Germanic tribes: The bravest Chatti devote their entire lives to battle; having no possessions, they are free from any obligations on the court (*nulli domus aut ager aut aliqua cura*); they deal thoughtlessly with the property of others (*prodigi alieni*) and live off the generosity of their hosts (*Germania*, XXXI). These warriors are no doubt accustomed to all their whims, including sexual intercourse with the wives or daughters of their compatriots.

A few centuries later, the famous *Jómsvíkingar* also lead a way of life that excludes starting a family. Their laws explicitly state: *engi maðr skyldi konu hafa innan í borgina* ("no man shall have a wife in the fortress").¹⁰⁸ In all likelihood, this disciplinary rule does not correspond to a demand for absolute abstinence. The wording of this law makes it clear that it only applies to the presence of women within the fortress.

100 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 153 ff.

101 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, pp. 5-14 and 94-101.

102 Detter (ed.) 1891, pp. 56-58.

103 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, pp. 142-148.

104 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 6 f.

105 Cf. the references in Boberg 1966, p. 125 (motif F610.3.4.2.1: Berserkr killed in combat about maiden). Cf. also Schlauch 1934, pp. 104-106.

106 Dehmer 1927, pp. 86-91. Dehmer attempts to describe the complete form of this literary motif. (p. 86), which he recognizes is rarely presented in its entirety. For a more differentiated approach, see the comments by Reuschel 1933, p. 101.

107 Victory in 1966.

108 Reading of *Holm perg 7 4to* (cf. Blake (transl.) 1962, p. 18). Other manuscripts transmit similar readings, such as *AM 291 4to: Allz engi maðr scyllde þar kono hafa jNan borgar* (cf. the edition by af Petersens (ed.) 1882, p. 64).

of the fortress. Outside of this enclosed space, i.e. also on raids and during raids, the *Jómsvíkingar* are not explicitly forbidden to seek the company of a woman.

Even beast warriors of noble descent wait several years before starting a family and settling on their land; before that they lead the adventurous life of the Vikings, as did Kveld-Úlfr and his companion Berðlu- Kári in 9th century Norway (*Egils saga*, ch. I).

Singleness is therefore more likely to be regarded as a habit of the berserkers - at least during the early part of their career. This state can also last longer if their modest circumstances or unpolished behavior do not allow them to enter into a respectable union (Halli and Leiknir in the *Eyrbyggja saga*).

In other cases, abduction may be the most glorious way for the warriors to achieve their goals. The sources confirm that this method is used several times: In the *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson describes the expedition that Hárekr gandr¹⁰⁹ undertakes against the beast warrior Haki haðaberserkr ('Haki, berserker from Hadeland'), the kidnapper of King Sigurðr hjörtr's ('Sigurd Stag') daughter.¹¹⁰

In Denmark, Saxo Grammaticus describes the debauchery of the twelve sons of Westmarus, who, as *contubernales* of King Frotho (*Gesta Danorum*, V, i, 11), claim the right of the first night for themselves or renounce it in return for payment. Their unseemly behavior is reminiscent of the arrogance with which the "berserk suitor" expresses his intention to marry.

In addition, these *contubernales*, also known as *pugiles* ("fighters"),¹¹¹ are depicted as frenzied warriors howling like wolves¹¹². They harass their leader's guests: they seem to want to hang them,¹¹³ pull

109 For the various possible interpretations of the byname *gandr*, see Dillmann 2000a, p. 431 f. Dillmann opts for the following translation: *Harek le Loup* ('Wolf-Harek').

110 *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, p. 91 f. On this episode, see also Ólafía Einarisdóttir 1990, p. 272 f. She believes that the death of the berserker Haki has an "Odin-like" character: he commits suicide by letting himself fall on his sword.

111 The twelve berserkers sent to Sweden by King Hrólfkraki as reinforcements for King Aðil (cf. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* [Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931], p. 140) are referred to as *pugiles* in the *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta* (cf. Bjarni Guðnason (ed.) 1982, p. 29).

112 *Gesta Danorum*, V, iii, 9: *pugiles* [. . .] *qui* [. . .] *ululantium more luporum horrissonas dedere voces*.

113 Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 79 has emphasized the Odinic character of this harassment. Norse mythology reports that Óðinn hanged himself by the rope (cf. especially *Hávamál*, Str. 138). In addition, Óðinn bears several epithets that are reminiscent of his position as "God of the hanged" (Hangaguð, Hangatýr, cf. Falk 1924, p. 15). Snorri Sturluson also uses the expression "lord of the hanged" (*hanga-dróttinn*; *Ynglinga saga*, p. 18). For further references, see above all von Amira 1922, pp. 201-204.

They take skins from under their feet, scourge them, burn them,¹¹⁴ beat them with bones¹¹⁵ and force them to drink until they collapse.¹¹⁶ In Old Norse literature, too, the berserkers are reported to take many liberties with the guests *during the jöl period*, but without indulging in such excesses.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

In the texts it is an invariable ritual that an animal warrior first introduces himself to the master of the house, asks his permission and then goes to each guest in turn, whom he invites to compete with him in a few words: *telst þú jafnsnjallr mér?*⁽¹¹⁸⁾ ("do you think you are my equal?"). Of course, everyone loses except the hero, whose strength and skill, necessarily for the course of the saga, lead to the humiliation of the challengers.¹¹⁹ Sometimes, however, a royal arbitration puts an end to the ⁽¹²⁰⁾

Beyond the narrative, purely functional image, the motif of the "challenge in the hall"¹²¹ probably also expresses a memory of an ancient custom. It is undoubtedly a kind of

Dumézil particularly investigated the death of King Hadingus, which is described in the *Gesta Danorum* (Dumézil 2000, pp. 91-120).

114 For the acid test in connection with the *berserks gangr*, see below.

115 *Gesta Danorum*, V, i, 11: *Advenes ossibus converberabant*. A similar event takes place during the wedding of Rolpho's sister (II, vi, 9): The *pugiles* (this term is used to describe King Hrólfr's berserkers) beat Hialto with bones. This incident ends with the intervention of Biarco. This episode is also recounted in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*. In the historical sources, Sven Agge- sen, *Opuscula historica* (Gertz (ed.) 1917, I, p. 74)), which was written towards the end of the 12th century. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports how the Danes "stoned" Aelfeah, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with bones and animal skulls on April 12, 1012 (Plummer (ed.) 1952, I, p. 142).

116 Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 80 discovered strange similarities between Saxo's description and the traditions in the German Hanseatic trading post in Bergen (cf. Holberg 1753): The apprentice there had to pass a series of tests. He was symbolically hanged, exposed to smoke and scourged. Weiser-Aall, who takes up the thesis of Karl von Amira (1922, pp. 201-204), argues for the shift from old rituals to sanctions. She also refers to customs that were common in some guilds.

117 In the *Víga-Glúms saga*, a similar scene occurs during a *disablót* (Jónas Krist- jánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 9).

118 *Svarfdæla saga*, ch. VII, p. 144.

119 *Víga-Glúmr* also refers Björn járnhauss to the hall of his grandfather Vigfúss (Jónas Krist- jánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 17 ff.).

120 As it happens twice in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*: once with Svipdagr, another time with Bǫðvarr bjarki (Rafn (ed.) 1829, pp. 45 and 74).

121 This motif is sometimes associated with the stereotype of the "berserk suitor" (cf. Moldi in the *Svarfdæla saga*).

martial display¹²² - an aggressive version of the verbal battles that were so popular in the ancient North (cf. the tradition of *mannjafnaðr*, 'male comparison'). Other scholars have also interpreted these challenges as a of initiation rites - this theory was put forward by Lily Weiser-Aall¹²³ in 1927 and subsequently revived by Mary Danielli,¹²⁴ Margaret Arent¹²⁵ and Benjamin Blaney¹²⁶. Indeed, according to the saga tradition, the berserkers seem to have played a special role among the guests during certain cult ceremonies (which usually took place during the winter): The beast warriors set themselves the task of a newcomer to the test; they thus give him the opportunity to his worth before he can take his rightful place in the hall (thus Víga-Glúmr, who wins the host's respect through his behavior).¹²⁷ In the Icelandic sagas, this ritual is at the expense of the beast warrior, who is usually driven away or killed - thus in the medieval sources it is no longer a description of a ritualized entrance examination, but a purely literary motif, which is perhaps also influenced by the theme of the "berserk suitor".

is influenced.

One of the many forms of initiation rituals (or hardening of youth) is to expose the examinee to fire. The twelve warriors of Hrólfr krakis (depicted as berserkers in *the Snorra Edda*) are confronted with this situation in Aðils' Hall.¹²⁸ The beast warriors are usually depicted as being unaffected by fire in a state of ecstatic frenzy.¹²⁹ Moreover, the trial by fire has an undeniable proximity to mythology - as evidenced by the trials to which, disguised as the peasant Hrani, subjects King Hrólfr and his warriors.¹³⁰ Another episode of *Hrólfs saga kraka* provides an example of a complete initiation rite: it deals with

122 Cf. Saxo's remark in connection with Anganterus and his eight brothers in the *Gesta Danorum*, VI, vii, 5: *more scaenico decursantes in pugnam se mutua adhortatione firm- abant*. Here the behavior of these warriors is associated with a kind of stage play. In the course of this episode, they also challenge their opponents by howling "like wild dogs" (*saevientium canum exemplo*).

123 Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 43 f.

124 Danielli 1945.

125 Arent 1969, p. 133 f.

126 Blaney 1972, p. 90 f.

127 *Víga-Glúms saga*, ch. VI (Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 19).

128 *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. XVI (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 84 ff.).

129 According to Snorri Sturluson, neither fire nor swords have any effect on men who in the *berserksgangr*: *hvárki eldr né jarn orti á þá* (*Ynglinga saga*, p. 18). This motif appears frequently in the sagas.

130 *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. XXXIX (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 77 ff.). According to the second stanza of the *Grimnis- mál*, Óðinn himself sat among fires for eight nights without food.

of the progress made by the young Hǫttr, who is called to the hero Hialti, under the guidance of Bǫðvarr bjarki.¹³¹ The adventures of the young Sinfjǫtli in the *Vǫlsunga saga* - his transformations into a wolf at the side of his father Sigmundr¹³² - have also been interpreted by Otto Höfler as an account of a warlike Odinic initiation.¹³³ This passage of the saga shows clear links with the myths and beliefs associated with the beast warriors, but contains no direct reference to the *berserksgangr*.

In the absence of clearer evidence, it is hardly possible to speak of more than one theory on the basis of the indications found in the *Fornaldarsögur*. However, certain elements of the literary tradition allow us to speak of "initiation rites" in the pre-Christian north,¹³⁴ even if the historical sources are silent on this point⁽¹³⁵⁾.

Nevertheless, it is highly probable that the animal warriors have a close connection to the pagan cults. One of the stanzas written by the skald Egill shortly before his duel with Ljótr hinn bleiki contains a revealing formulation: he prepares to fight "the one who sacrifices to the gods" (*við þanns [. . .] blótar bǫnd*).¹³⁶

In the accounts of the Christianization of the north, the beast warrior is logically one of the enemies of the Christian missionaries. In some cases, they demonstrate the power of the Christian faith by bringing berserkers under their control, thereby achieving the conversion of the population.

The two beast warriors named Haukr in the *Vatnsdæla saga*¹³⁷ are kept at bay by the Saxon bishop Friðrekr, who worked as a missionary in northern Iceland around 980. During a feast, the man of God blesses the fires that light the hall; the berserkers stride through the hall, that they are invulnerable; the blessing gesture that Friðrekr performs

131 Rafn (ed.) 1829, pp. 69-76. For a complete analysis of this scene in relation to the version of Saxo Grammaticus, see Dumézil 1985, pp. 222 f.

132 *Vǫlsunga saga*, ch. VIII (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 130 ff.).

133 Höfler 1934, pp. 188-218.

134 Cf. Schjødt 2008.

135 However, several sources provide evidence of martial initiation rites in the ancient Germanic world: according to Tacitus (*Germania*, XXXI), the warriors of the Chatti let their hair grow until they have killed their first enemy; among the Taifali, the young warriors - according to Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, XXXI, ix, 5, (Rolfé (ed./Trans.) 1961, p. 444 f.) - kill a bear or boar in order to free themselves from the dishonorable tutelage of their elders; Procopius writes (*De bellis*, I, ii, 25) that the young warriors of the Heruli only receive a shield once they have proven their worth (Dewing (ed./Trans.) 1914-1940, I, p. 487).

136 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 203. According to Marold 1992 (p. 707) it is nevertheless "very probable that the verse does not originate from Egill himself, but from a later time".

137 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 124 f.

However, the fact that they have a new wife makes them vulnerable and they catch fire; they are then beaten to death by the guests armed with clubs. This episode is also recounted in the *Kristni saga*¹³⁸ and the *Þorvalds þáttur víðfjörla*⁽¹³⁹⁾. A similar feat is attributed to the priest Þangbrandr, who defeats the beast warrior Ótrygggr ('unfaithful one') in the *Njáls saga*.¹⁴⁰ Despite the obviously stereotypical depiction of these exemplary events⁽¹⁴¹⁾, it clearly shows a connection between the berserkers and paganism. In addition, Old Norse hagiography also reports that some beast warriors very quickly converted to Christianity: In the *Óláfs saga helga*, Afrafasti and Gauka-Þórir embrace the true faith before the king's army on the battlefield of Stiklastaðir;¹⁴² Þórir hundr is also touched by the grace of God on the evening of the battle and declares the holiness of the ruler fought shortly before.¹⁴³

In courtly-inspired literature, the motif of the "pagan" berserker is also used, but it is expanded to include some astonishing details: the animal warriors are given exotic, even monstrous features.

3 "Exotic" figures and ominous creatures

In the *Riddarasögur*, the term *berserkr* is associated with a wide variety of figures. It is mainly used in connection with Muslims¹⁴⁴ and blacks.

138 Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Peter Foote (eds.) 2003, p. 9.

139 Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Peter Foote (eds.) 2003, pp. 69 f. and 93 f.

140 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1954, p. 267 f. On Ótrygggr, see also *Kristni saga* (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Peter Foote (eds.) 2003, p. 25) and *Kristniboð Þangbrands* (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Peter Foote (eds.) 2003, p. 139).

141 Cf. von Padberg 2003.

142 In the legendary version of the saga, the two *kappar* ("fighters") are depicted as *nalega bær-særkir* ("almost berserkers", cf. Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, pp. 176 and 182). In the *Heimskringla* version, Gauka-Þórir and Afrafasti are in turn described as "the worst of the wretches" (*þeir vǫru stíga-menn inir mestu*, *Óláfs saga helga*, p. 448). Snorri Sturluson describes in detail the size, strength and fighting spirit of these two warriors. Before they change their faith, Gauka-Þórir and Afrafasti seem to already developed a certain neutrality towards the pagan faith. The sources agree on this point: The legendary *Óláfs saga* notes that they "do not sacrifice [to the gods]" (*Blotaðu ækci* [Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982], p. 176), and Snorri also credits them with a certain religious indifference (*Óláfs saga helga*, pp. 448 f.).

143 Cf. *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 496. According to the legendary *Óláfs saga*, he subsequently died during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, p. 196). Cf. also *Magnúss saga ins góða*, p. 22.

144 Cf. For example, the figures of Bæringr Jarl (*Mírmants saga*, pp. 160-166), Kaldanus (*Hektors saga*, pp. 100 f.) or Lucanus (*Blómstrvallasaga*, pp. 20-23). The hagiographical literature mentions Ermogenes, a Jewish sorcerer and persecutor of Christians. He is described as the "[most persistent] berserker

(*blámenn*, Sg. *blámaðr*)¹⁴⁵, who come from countries such as *Bláland* (Ethiopia)¹⁴⁶ or *Serkland* (Islamic North Africa)⁽¹⁴⁷⁾. The frequent occurrence of the alliterative phrase *blámenn ok berserkir*¹⁴⁸ clearly shows the stereotypical character of these people. In the medieval imagination, black skin color had negative connotations and was associated with various types of terrifying creatures: Giants, demons, sorcerers, Saracens, etc.¹⁴⁹ This topos more often in the *chansons de geste* and the courtly romances from which the *Ridda-rasögur* largely draw.

The motif of the berserker's 'darkness', which is described in detail in the 'chivalric' texts, also appears in the *Íslendingasögur* - but in a more realistic form. Some berserkers of the Old North do indeed have a "darker" skin or hair color than the people around them: the father and grandfather of the skald Egill, who are both afflicted by fits of frenzy, have black hair.¹⁵⁰ The connection between the berserker and the *blámaðr* is thus based on an extremely complex tradition, in which the original Old Norse elements merge with influences from continental European literature. Several of the berserkers described in the *Riddarasögur* also display a strange characteristic, which is expressed by the adjective *háflitr* ("half colored", "two-colored") is expressed:

Sóti er bölvaðr berserkr, hann er háflitr, er hann öðrumegin blár, en öðrumegin rauðr.¹⁵¹

(Sóti is a cursed berserker, he is two-colored, he is blue on one side and black on the other).

In the *Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns*, this abominable peculiarity is explicitly linked to the world of the dead:

against the Christians" (*mestan berserkr at beriaz i moti kristninni*, cf. *Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jacobs*, p. 578; quoted in Breen 1999a, p. 134).

145 Cf. *Blómstrvallasaga*, p. 23; *Hektors saga*, p. 130; *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ólvis*, pp. 457 f. and 466 f. For further references, see Boberg 1966, p. 124, motif F610.3.2 (Black berserk) and Breen 1999a, S. 135.

146 Cf. *Hektors saga*, p. 103.

147 Cf. *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ólvis*, p. 457. On the possible localization of Serkland, see above all Dillmann 2006, p. 368, note 7.

148 Cf. *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ólvis*, p. 458.

149 Cf. e.g. Colby 1965, p. 85 ff.; Curry 1916, p. 87-90.

150 Egill resembles his father Grímr, from whom he inherited his ugly appearance and black hair: *mjök ljótr ok líkr feðr sínum, svartr á hár*. Grímr also resembles his father, the beast warrior Kveld-Úlfr. Cf. *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 5: *Grímr var svartr maðr ok ljótr, líkr feðr sínum, bæði yfirlits ok at skaplyndi* ('Grímr was a dark and ugly man who resembled his father, both in appearance and character').

151 *Hálfðanar saga brönuþóstra*, p. 561.

Hann [*i. e. Romanus*] var audru meigin blár sem hel, en audru meigin faulur sem aska.¹⁵²

(He [*i. e. Romanus*] was blue as Hel on one side and pale as ashes on the other).

In Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, the goddess of the dead (Hel) is also described with these words:

Hon er bla half, en half með havrvndar lit.¹⁵³

(She is half blue, and half with a skin-colored face).

The epithet *blásiða* ('blue [black] side'), which the Viking Björn bears in the *Harðar saga*⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ possibly indicates a connection to the beast warriors. In addition, his ancestors include several people with meaningful names: Úlfheðinn, Úlfhamr, Úlfr, Úlfhamr in hamrammi.

The berserkers of the courtly sagas are not only depicted with the features of fearsome pagans, sometimes they are also compared to a *troll* (or *tröll*). In the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*¹⁵⁵, Grímr ægi's followers include several *kappar* and *berserkir*: *líkari tröllum en mönnum* ('more like trolls than men'). In the *Heiðreks saga*, Hergrímr is nicknamed *hálftröll*. The descendant of the giant Ýmir conscientiously visits his ancestor's people, where he also chooses a wife; as "very skilled in magic and a great berserker" (*allfjölkunnugr ok berserkr mikill*), Hergrímr has inherited an extraordinary strength from his ancestors: *hann hafði afli sem jötnar* ("he was as strong as giants").¹⁵⁶

The berserkers are also sometimes attributed to legendary armies, such as the King Núdus' army from Serkland in the *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ólvis* (Ch. III):

Hann hefir með sér allra handa lýð, Blámenn ok tröll ok berserki ok risa ok dverga ok annat fýtonsandafólk.¹⁵⁷

(He carries all kinds of people with him, Blámenn and trolls and berserkers and giants and dwarves and other fairy-like folk).

The beast warriors of Ermedon from Bláland in the *Sigurðar saga þögla* are also accompanied by dwarves, giants, trolls, cynocephali and other monsters (people who have only one eye in the middle of their forehead, headless people whose mouth and eyes on their upper body or shoulder blades)⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

152 Rydberg (ed.) 1917, p. 14.

153 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 35.

154 Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991, p. 46.

155 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 326.

156 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 412.

157 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 457.

158 Loth (ed.) 1963, p. 177.

The sagas belonging to the *Fornaldarsögur* or *Riddarasögur* genre are not the only sources in which the berserkers described as semi-saga-like figures.¹⁵⁹ In the prologue of his *Edda*, Snorri Sturluson¹⁶⁰ mentions berserkers alongside giants and dragons, who are among the creatures that fall under hammer blows.¹⁶¹ However, in the *Heimskringla*, also written by Snorri, several 'historical' (or portrayed as such) figures are introduced as 'beast warriors'. How can this contradiction be explained?

In pagan Scandinavia, the skalds describe groups of berserkers as a form of allegiance closely associated with kingship (*Haraldsk- væði*, Str. 20 and 21). The memory of this institution has survived in Norwegian historiography, in the *Konungasögur*. Some episodes in the *sögur* and the *Fornaldarsögur* also contain this motif. At the same time, the Icelandic *sagnamenn* have developed a negative image of the berserker - a reminder of the hostility their ancestors felt towards animal warriors. This aversion, which was particularly strong in Iceland, undoubtedly spread throughout the rest of Scandinavia long before the sagas were written, in connection with the elites' turning away from pagan beliefs.

In most cases, the *Íslendingasögur* equate the animal warriors with swordsmen or highwaymen, just as the *Fornaldarsögur* often give them fairytale-like features - a process that is reinforced by the imitation of courtly models in the *Riddarasögur*.

Consequently, the term *berserkr* can be used for a wide variety of figures in medieval literature. Of course, this also applies to the topoi associated with the description of the *berserksgangr*.

The contradictory character of these stereotypes is not necessarily the result of a late development, as the phenomenon of berserkers had already lost all historical consistency in the north by the time the saga was written down. In Norway, the first beast warriors probably appeared as early as the first half of the 11th century and disappeared: Þórir hundr and his companions are among the last representatives of their kind. The demise of this phenomenon coincides with Christianization, an event that took place long before the emergence of written sources in the Old Norse language. For more than a century, the image of the berserker was subject to changes due to the various

159 Breen (1999a, p. 143 f.) interprets a much older tradition in the same way: that of *Hárbarðljóð*. However, the term *berserkr* is not used in this work on its own, but as part of the expression *brúðir berserkia* ('brides of the berserkers') (Str. 37), which probably corresponds to a metaphorical designation of the 'giantesses'.

160 Whether Snorri actually wrote this prologue is disputed; cf. e.g. Heusler 1908; Klingenberg 1993.

161 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 4.

exposed to the greatest influences. In the course of this time, both the historical facts merged with saga motifs and the Old Norse oral tradition with continental European literary models. The literary figure of the beast warrior, which emerged from this complex heritage, was undoubtedly heterogeneous from a very early stage.

This semantic development sometimes leads to astonishing results: In some cases, no reference is made either to the historical role of animal warriors in pre-Christian Scandinavia or to their negatively connoted behavior as duelists, highwaymen or ominous figures. Instead, the term *berserkr* is used - even in a Christian context - as a term for bold, even virtuous warriors.

4 The virtuous fighter

In the *Vatnsdæla saga*, the character Jökull is described in the following words:

[. . .] þat er sannmælt til Jökuls, at engi berserkr [er] slíkr í öllum Norðlendingafjórðungi sem hann.¹⁶²

([. . .] this is true about Jökull, that no berserker in all the fjords of the Northlands is like him).

Also in Þorvalds *þáttr víðfjara*, King Sveinn presents tjúguskegg Þorvaldr víð- fjörli as *styrkr ok hugdjarfr sem hinn öruggasti berserkr* ("strong and courageous like the most fearless berserker")⁽¹⁶³⁾.

In the *Ívens saga*,¹⁶⁴ the Old Norse prose version of *Yvain* by Chrétien des Troyes, the Old Norse *berserkr* is used as a translation for the Old French *chan- pion*, which denotes the lion of Yvain.¹⁶⁵ In Old French verse, the word *champion* in a different context (v. 5574: *li dui champion*) also refers to two "ugly and black" warriors (*hideus et noirs*, v. 5512). These are terrible opponents armed with clubs, who resist Yvain's blows for a long time and resemble the *blámenn ok berserkir* of the Icelandic sagas in their description. However, the Scandinavian translator is to translate *li dui champion* with a simple formulation:

162 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 89. *berserksgangr* is also partly described as a disease in the same work (see chapter IV above).

163 Kahle (ed.) 1905, p. 64. However, the same work also contains the episode in which Bishop Friðrekr defeats two berserkers. They try in vain to cross the fire blessed by the bishop.

164 *Ívens saga* (Kölbing (ed.) 1898), p. 91.

165 Cf. *Ivain*, v. 4454.

þeir ii. The use of the word *berserkr* with an obviously positive connotation is thus reserved for the lion of Yvain.

In the *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans*¹⁶⁶, the term *berserkr* is used as a variant of *góðr riddari* ("good knight").¹⁶⁷ Later, Roland also refers to Bishop Turpin as *bersekr góðr í móti heiðrum mönnum* ("good berserker against the pagan men").¹⁶⁸ In the *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, which originated in Norway towards the end of the 13th century,⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ the term *hinn vngi bersekr guðs* ("the young berserker of God") is used. In Norway,⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ the expression *hinn vngi bersekr guðs* ("the young berserker of God") is used.¹⁷⁰ Antoine the Great is referred to in the same work as a "berserker of Christ"!¹⁷¹ These pious warriors of faith are only slightly similar to the wild beast warriors of King Haraldr hárfagrís.

The image of the "virtuous" berserker undoubtedly inspired the use of this noun as an epithet in 14th century Norway. A document from 1354 mentions a certain Thoror berserker;¹⁷² a will from 1389 cites a person called Oghmunder bærsærker.¹⁷³ This last example illustrates the variety of ideas associated with the word *berserkr* in medieval Scandinavia.

The investigation of the role of the berserkers in the Icelandic sagas nevertheless allows authentic traditional elements to be filtered out of the stereotypes and literary conventions. This directly to the understanding of the phenomenon of animal warriors. It is advisable to apply this approach to the study of the various descriptions of the *berserksgangr*.

B The characteristics of the *berserksgangr* and the vocabulary of transformation

The Skalds of the 9th century provide little information on the behavior of the beast warriors. Nevertheless, their tradition proves to be valuable, as it

¹⁶⁶ Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 456.

¹⁶⁷ Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 456, note 11, variant of reading *b*.

¹⁶⁸ Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 522.

¹⁶⁹ The oldest preserved manuscript (*Holm perg 6 folo*) of the various versions of this work was written around 1275.

¹⁷⁰ Keyser / Unger (ed.) 1851, p. 197.

¹⁷¹ Keyser / Unger (eds.) 1851, p. 54: *En Iesus Krístr glöemdy eigi holmgangu síns bersserks* ("but Jesus Christ has not forgotten the duel of his berserker"). In this context, the Old Norse *berserkr* seems to correspond to the Latin *athleta* (cf. John of Damascus, *Ion. Damasceni Historia dvorvm Christi militvm e Graeco in Latinvm versa* in *Opera Ion. Damasceni*, 1539, p. 115 (cf. Breen 1999a, p. 109, note 71).

¹⁷² *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 2, no. 326 (Lange / Unger (ed.) 1852, p. 267).

¹⁷³ *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* 4, no. 564 (Lange / Unger (ed.) 1858, p. 422).

probably based on direct observation. Stanzas 20 and 21 of *Ha- raldskvæði* describe the berserkers as brave fighters without giving detailed information about their behavior (see chapter III above); stanza 8, on the other hand, describes the sounds they make: *grenjuðu berserkir, [. . .] emjuðu úlfheðnar*. Despite the terse wording, the stanza gives an important clue at this point: the roaring of the animal warriors emphasizes their resemblance to wild animals.¹⁷⁴

The wearing of bearskins (for *ber-serkir*) or wolfskins (for *ulf-heðnar*) naturally to reinforce the impression created.¹⁷⁵ Three centuries later, in the *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri associates the *berserksgangr* with the ferocity of animals: Óðinnmen are *galnir sem hundar eða vargar* ('fierce as dogs or wolves'); they bite their shields and are *sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar* ('strong as bears or bulls'); they fight their enemies without fearing the bite of iron or fire, and the weapons of their opponents seem blunt.¹⁷⁶

Here Snorri provides in a few words an archetypal presentation of the most important features of the *berserksgangr* in Icelandic literature. The author of the *Heimskringla* certainly did not invent the individual elements of this tradition freely;¹⁷⁷ however, he has masterfully summarized them in this text. These motifs are inserted and combined in various ways in many sagas.

1 The description of the *berserksgangr*

Among the numerous studies devoted to this topic in the course of the 20th century, the studies by Hermann Güntert,¹⁷⁸ Fredrik Grøn,¹⁷⁹ Gerard Breen¹⁸⁰ and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir¹⁸¹ in particular provide a comprehensive overview of the Old Norse source material.

This paper does not claim to provide a detailed account of the literary evidence. Rather, an attempt is made to

174 The verb *grenja* is used repeatedly in connection with wild animals in Old Norse literature, especially for the Fenris wolf in the *Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, S. 37): *Hann greniar illiga*. Cf. also the expression *greniaði hann sem et oarga dyr* in *Díalógar Gregors páfa*, p. 221.

175 For the etymology of the terms *berserkr* and *úlfheðinn*, see chap. II above.

176 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 17 f.

177 On the credibility of Snorri's tradition, see chapter VI above.

178 Güntert 1912.

179 Grøn 1929a.

180 Breen 1999a, pp. 63-84.

181 Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, especially pp. 332-335.

to show elements of tradition that can contribute to the development of a historical interpretation of the phenomenon.

The roar

The roaring of the beast warriors, which is frequently mentioned in the Old Norse accounts,¹⁸² is sometimes explicitly compared to the roaring of wild animals or the howling of dogs: In the *Vatnsdæla saga*¹⁸³ it is said of the two beast-warriors, named Haukr, that they "howl like dogs" (*þeir grenjuðu sem hundar*). The same expression also appears in the *Grettis saga*.

The motif also appears in Saxo Grammaticus: As Starcatherus approaches, Anganterus and his brothers howl "like wild dogs" (*Gesta*, VI, vii, 5: *sunt qui eos venienti athletae saevientium canum exemplo oblatrasse perhibeant*). The text of the *Gesta* is also reminiscent of the tradition of the "sword dance":¹⁸⁴ The

182 In addition to the texts mentioned in this section, the motif of 'roaring' also appears in *Gunnars saga keldugnúpsfjfls* (p. 370 f.), *Kristni saga* (Eiríkur Jónsson / Finnur Jónsson (eds.) 1892-1896, pp. 127), the *Heiðreks saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829, pp. 416-425), the *Hromundar saga Gripssonar* (p. 368), the *Ásmundar saga kappabana* (pp. 470 and 481 ff.), the *Viktors saga og Blávus* (Loth (ed.) 1964, p. 29) and the *Hektors saga* (pp. 102 and 166). For further references, see Breen 1999a, pp. 66-69 and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, pp. 332 f.

183 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 124.

184 The one-eyed figure accompanying the wolf warrior on Torslunda's Model D is often referred to as a "weapon dancer". It is interpreted by Beck 1968a as an image of Óðinn. Human figures equipped with spears or swords and assuming a dancing or leaping posture are depicted on several pictorial monuments from the Migration Period, the Migration Period and the Viking Age. See, for , the gold horns from Gallehus, the bracteates from Års-B (Hauck et al. 1985-1989: 1.2, pp. 28-29; 1.3, plates 7-8) and the helmet from Sutton Hoo.

"Sword dances" have been performed in the Germanic world since ancient times, as Tacitus describes in Chapter XXIV of *Germania* testifies: [. . .] *nudi juvenes, quibus id ludicrum est, inter gladios se atque infestas frameas saltu jacunt*. - ". . . naked young men, for whom it a pleasure, leap between swords and hostile threatening frames." (Fughrmann (ed./trans.) 2007,

S. 37). Perret (ed./trans.) 1997, p. 85, note 1 assumes that this weapon play originally associated with cultic ceremonies. Some researchers see this tradition as a reminder of the initiation rites of young warriors; others associate this phenomenon with fertility rites during the winter solstice celebrations (cf. Müllenhof 1871; Fehrle 1914,

p. 161 f.; Naumann 1921, p. 124 f.; Meschke 1931; Wolfram 1935-1938; Sharp 1951; Alford 1962; Beck 1968b; de Vries 1970, 1, §§ 60, 84, 303). Rock carvings from the Scandinavian Bronze Age depicting ritual battle scenes provide early evidence for the cultic character of such weapons games (cf. Almgren 1934, p. 112 f.; Gelling / Davidson 1969). In the medieval sources there are still traces of weapon dances performed by Scandinavian warriors: According to a Byzantine tradition (cf. the treatise *De Officiis*, written down in the 14th century by Georgios Kodinus), the Varangians clashed their axes when they appeared at court during the Christmas season (cf. Sjöberg 1907, p. 35) - a tradition reminiscent of the so-called *Gotthikon*, which Constantine VII mentions at the end of the 10th century in his *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae* (I, 92). The text of Constantine VII was partly

Animal warriors inciting each other to fight simulate a battle, which they perform "like actors" (*more scaenico decursantes in pugnam se mutua adhortatione firmabant*). The shouting and "barking" seem to have been part of an elaborate war ritual designed to impress the enemy.

In another passage, Saxo Grammaticus also describes the horrifying cries of the sons of West Marus, which are said to resemble the howling of wolves (*Gesta*, V, iii, 9: *ululantium more luporum horrisonas dedere voces*).

In a well-known episode of the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli howl "with wolf voices" after they clothed themselves with the fur of these animals: *letu ok vargsroddu*.¹⁸⁵

Some berserkers even utter a whole series of cries, as evidenced by the expressions in connection with the Angantýr brothers in the *Qrvar-Odds saga*:¹⁸⁶ *emja* ("to howl"),¹⁸⁷ *gjalla* ("to yell, to bel- low": *sem griðúngar gjalli*), *grenja* ("to howl, to bellow"), *yǫla* ("to howl, to yelp as dogs, wolves": *sem [. . .] hundar yǫli*), *qskra* ("to bellow").¹⁸⁸ In this text, the imitation of animal sounds is explicitly mentioned. Other sources only describe the terror that these cries spread (cf. the expression *grenjaliga*: "terrible howling"),¹⁸⁹ which are sometimes compared to the sounds of trolls (*grenja sem tröll*).¹⁹⁰

The description of the *ritual* has been interpreted as a description of a Nordic *jul ritual* in which the animal warriors put on a show. However, the significance of this ritual performance, which has often been compared to the masquerades from Germanic folklore (e.. the Perchtenlauf from Tyrol), remains unclear. Following Lily Weiser-Aall, Höfler attempted to draw a parallel between the weapon dance, the

"wild hunt" and the myth of the "army of the dead" (see also Eike 1980 on Norwegian Christmas customs). Incidentally, "sword dances" occur throughout the Indo-European world. The Salians practiced a similar tradition as priests of Mars in Rome. Among the ancient Greeks, the Pyrrhichios (πυρρίχη) was mostly as part of ritual acts (cf. Delavaud 1990; Delavaud-Roux 1993). Xenophon (*Anabasis*, VI, I, 5) describes a similar fighting game among the Thracians, in which the death of a participant is simulated. The Indo-Aryan peoples undoubtedly knew a related practice; von Schröder notes that ". . . the young men of the people performed common weapon dances at certain festive times, in which the dancers represented the departed spirits of the tribe, especially apparently the departed warriors" (von Schröder 1908). The tradition of sword dances has been preserved in many areas of Europe until modern times (especially in Scandinavia, England, Spain and Portugal as well as in the German-speaking areas and the Netherlands). On the Shetland Islands, the sword dance is associated with Christmas celebrations.

185 *Vǫlsunga saga* (Olsen (ed.) 1906/1908), p. 15.

186 *Qrvar-Odds saga*: [. . .] *mér þik stundum, sem griðúngar gjalli, eðr hundar, en stundum erlikt, sem grenjat sé* [. . .] (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 211).

187 Cf. the *Haraldskvæði*, Str. 8 (*emjuðu úlfheðnar*) or the *Atlamál*, Str. 24: *emioðo úlfar*.

188 The English translations of the Old Norse verbs are taken from the *IED*.

189 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), ch. LXIV, p. 202.

190 *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. XXX, p. 322.

In many stereotypical *sagnamenn* accounts, the berserkers' screams are accompanied by symptoms that the *berserksgangr* a quasi-sick dimension. In this evidence of frenzy, the berserkers are reported to bite the edges of their shields.

The biting of the shields

Snorri mentions this strange habit in his "classic" description of the *berserksgangr* (*Ynglinga saga*, chap. VI). Several episodes in the *Íslendingasögur* illustrate this motif. In chapter LXIV of *Egils saga*, Ljótr begins to roar terribly and bite his shield (*tók hann þá að grenja illiliga ok beit í skjöld sinn*) when he is overcome by the fury of the beast warriors as he enters the duel ground (*ok er hann gekk fram á vøllinn at hólmsaðnum, þá kom á hann berserksgangr*).⁽¹⁹¹⁾ In the stanza, which he writes while still on the battlefield, Egill mocks his opponent, who "bites the edge of his shield" (*bítr [. . .] skjöld at baugi*).⁽¹⁹²⁾

In the *Grettis saga*, this tactic proves fatal for the beast warrior Snækollr: at the moment when the berserker opens his mouth to howl and bite the shield, Grettir kicks the shield and dislocates its jaw.⁽¹⁹³⁾

The author of the *Vatnsdæla saga* seems to have been inspired by the *Ynglinga saga*: *Þeir grenjuðu sem hundar ok bitu í skjaldarrendur*.⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ Snorri states: *váru galnir sem hundar eða vargar, bitu í skjöldu sína*.⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ The *Vatnsdæla saga*, however, provides additional evidence and describes the custom of walking over fire with bare feet (*ok óðu eld brennanda berum fótum*); Snorri only emphasizes the invulnerability of the berserkers to fire or iron: *hvárti eldr né járn órti á þá*.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾

This custom is also described in the *Svarfdæla saga*: On the eve of *jól*, Moldi and his eleven companions enter the hall of the Jarl Herrǫðr, where they perform their usual feats of courage by stepping over fire and biting the edges of their shields (*gengu síðan inn í höllina tólf saman ok óðu þegar eldana ok bitu í skjaldarrendur*).⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ Obviously, the behavior of the berserkers at this point corresponds to a ritual intended to impress those present. The biting of their shields demonstrates their fearsome ferocity, which can be compared to that of dogs or wolves, from which, among other things, they can hear the howling of the berserkers.

191 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 202.

192 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 203.

193 *Grettis saga*, ch. XL (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 136.

194 *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. XLVI (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 124.

195 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 17.

196 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 18.

197 *Svarfdæla saga*, ch. VII, p. 142 f.

adopt. Similar motifs also occur in the *Fornaldarsögur* and the *Ridda- rasögur* (cf. above all *Heiðreks saga*, ch. V,¹⁹⁸ *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, ch. VIII,¹⁹⁹ *Viktors saga og Blávus*, ch. IX,²⁰⁰ *Hektors saga*, ch. VI²⁰¹). Some sources this motif, such as the *Hervarar saga*: 'During the duel on the island of Sámsey, Angantýr and his brothers almost eat the edge off their shields while froth escapes from their mouths (*gnöguðu í skjaldar rendrnar, en froða gaus úr kapti þeim*); they also stick out their tongues and gnash their teeth (*rèttu út túngurnar, ok urguðu saman tönnunum*). In the *Gesta Danorum*, the beast warrior Harthbenus tears off the upper part of his shield with one bite (*Gesta*, VII, ii, 11: *summas clipei partes morsus acerbitate consumpsit*). The behavior of the beast warriors here is reminiscent of hysteria and has led some scholars to interpret the *berserksgangr* as a mental illness.²⁰²

The Old Norse sources mainly describe the terror caused by the warlike appearance of the berserkers. The exaggeration in some descriptions is largely a literary stereotype. However, the motif of "biting the shield" is not an invention of the Icelandic *sagname*n. In this context, they relied on an older tradition, as evidenced by the figurines on the island of Lewis (Hebrides) in 1831: Four "rooks" of a total of 93 chess pieces made of walrus bone depict warriors with protruding eyes biting into the edges of their shields.²⁰³ The production of these objects can most probably be attributed to a Norwegian artist towards the end of the 12th century.²⁰⁴ The "shield-biting" is therefore a motif that already existed in the Scandinavian world before the saga period.

Gerard Breen associates this practice with chanting "under the shield" (*undir randir; Hávamál*, Str. 156)²⁰⁵ - an Odinic incantation which

198 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 425.

199 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 482.

200 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1964, p. 29.

201 Loth (ed.) 1962, p. 102. For further references see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, p. 333 and Breen 1999a, pp. 69-72.

202 Cf. Grøn 1929a, especially p. 48 f.; Reichborn-Kjennerud (1928-1947, 4, p. 147) considers the "shield-biting" of the berserker as a form of tetanic spasms (*trismus*).

203 *British Museum*, Iv. Cat. 123-125 and *The Museum of Scotland*, H. NS 29 (cf. Breen 1999a, p. 70). An illustration of these figures can be found in Roesdahl et al. 1992, p. 104, fig. 7. Cf. also Dalton 1909, p. 72 and plate XLVII.

204 On the origin and dating of these pieces, see above all Roesdahl 1992 et al., p. 390 f.; Caldwell et al., 2009.

205 Cf. Breen 1999a, pp. 69-72. On the basis of the etymological relationship between the Old Norse *grennian* ("to grin, shew the teeth", cf. Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, 1, p. 488) and the Old Norse *grenja*, Breen suggests that the motif of "howling" is related to that of "shield-biting".

is intended to make you invulnerable during combat (see Chapter V above).

By its very nature, shield-biting is a martial ritual intended to instil fear in the opponent. It contributes to the reputation of the berserkers, whose bloodthirsty rage is particularly feared.

The bloodthirsty aspects

The legendary sources tell us that the berserkers drink blood and eat raw meat, such as Grímr ægir in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*:

Hann átt hrátt, ok drakk blóð bæði úr mönnum ok fœnaði.⁽²⁰⁶⁾ (He ate raw meat and drank blood from both humans and animals.)

In the *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, the twelve companions of the Viking Grímarr Grímólfsson commit similar atrocities:

Þeir eta allir hrátt ok drekka blóð. Er þat sannkallat, at þeir sé heldr troll en menn.²⁰⁷
(They all eat raw meat and drink blood. It is said to be true that they are more like trolls than humans).

Grímarr is not explicitly referred to as *berserkr*, but his reputation for invulnerability leaves no doubt (*Hann bíta eigi járn*).

These texts, of course, have no historical value: the figure of Grímr ægir belongs solely to the realm of fairy tales, as evidenced by the various transformations attributed to him (dragon, serpent, boar and finally bull).²⁰⁸ In this context, the desire for human blood is mentioned to reinforce the monstrous impression created by these literary figures.

However, eating raw meat seems to have been a historical custom that was probably associated with pagan rites: Olaf the Holy forbade his troops to do so²⁰⁹ - a prohibition that is possibly recalled in the old Christian law of Borgarthing (Norway, 11th century).²¹⁰ The Viking laws (*víkingalög*) of the *Qrvar-Odds saga*, which, however, belong to the realm of legendary tradition, also reflect this attitude of rejection towards the activities of the animal warriors.

206 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 241.

207 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 106 f.

208 *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, p. 342.

209 *Fóstbræðra saga*, p. 199.

210 *Borgarþingslög* - *Kristinn réttir hinn forni*, I, 5 (pp. 341 f.).

Þá mælti Hjálmar: Þat er fyrst at segja, at ek vil aldri eta hrátt, nè lið mitt, því at þat er margra manna siðr, at vinda vöðva í klæðum, ok kalla þat soðit, en mér þikir þat þeirra siðr, er líkari eru vörpum enn mönnum.²¹¹

(Then Hjálmar said: "This is to say first that I never want to eat raw meat, nor do my followers, for it is the custom of many people to sling the meat wrapped in clothes, and they call it cooked, but it seems to me to be the custom of those who are more like wolves than men).

In contrast to the *Fornaldarsögur*, the *Königssagas* and the *Íslen- dingasögur* contain no references to the berserkers' preference for bloody meat. Rather, these accounts are reminiscent of beliefs that associate food with certain magical powers. According to this tradition, the blood of wild animals - especially that of bears or wolves - changes the behavior of those who ingest it.²¹²

In the *Ynglinga saga*, Svipdag tries to harden Ingjald, the son of King Qnundr, by giving him the heart of a wolf to eat. The episode ends with Ingjaldr changing and becoming cruel:

[. . .] lét Svipdagr taka hjarta ór vargi ok steikja á teini, ok gaf síðan Ingjaldi konungssyni at eta, ok þaðan af varð hann allra manna grimmastr og verst skaplundaðr.²¹³

([. . .] Svipdagr had the heart taken from the wolf and roasted on a spit, and he then gave it to the king's son Ingjaldr to eat, and he became the most evil of men and of the worst disposition).

In the *Landnámabók*, Oddr Arngeirsson becomes "evil and difficult to tame" (*illr ok ódæll við at eiga*),²¹⁴ eating the flesh of a bear. Among other things, this gives him further abilities with the idea of transformation or "transmigration" (*hann var svá mjök hamrammr*): He manages to cross the whole of Iceland in one night, so that the inhabitants of Þjórsdalar want to stone him to death (*grýta*) for sorcery (*fýri fjolkyngi ok trollska*).²¹⁵

The motif of 'wild blood' can also be found in the prehistoric sagas: In the *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Bǫðvarr bjarki strengthens the courage of his young protégé Hǫttr by forcing him to taste the heart and blood of a monster (*hit mesta troll*).⁽²¹⁶⁾

Without to berserkers, these texts emphasize the connection between magical-religious beliefs and the consumption of food.

211 *Orvar-Odds saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829), p. 194.

212 On this question see, among others, Maurer 1856, p. 111 f., note 38.

213 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 62.

214 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 286 (reading of the *Sturlubók*) and p. 287 (reading of the *Hauksbók*).

215 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 287.

216 Ch. XXXV (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 69) and Ch. XXIII (Slay (ed.) 1960, p. 78).

certain types of meat. Outside the Scandinavian world, medieval historiography also bears witness to the bloodthirsty reputation of the Germanic animal warriors: Paulus Diaconus reports of fighters with wolf heads (*cyno- cephal*) among the warriors of the Lombards, who are said to drink blood - that of the vanquished or, in the absence thereof, their own.²¹⁷

Another bloody custom inspired by the behavior of wild animals can also be associated with the *berserksgangr*: It is the subjugation of the opponent by a bite in hand-to-hand combat.²¹⁸ During a duel, the skald Egill throws himself at Atli and tears throat open with a bite.⁽²¹⁹⁾ In this situation, the grandson of the beast warrior Kveld-Úlfr displays a ferocity worthy of his ancestors. In the 13th century, the *Jónsbók* law text forbids such behavior:

Þat er, at menn bítiz um sem hundar eða hestar.²²⁰

(It is inappropriate for men to bite like dogs or horses).

Blind with rage, the warrior overcome by *berserksgangr* sometimes turns on his surrounding companions. In the *Egils saga*, Skalla-Grímr kills one of his son's playmates and then attacks him too, before causing the death of Egill's foster mother, who intervenes: *Ha- mask þú nú, Skalla-Grímr, at syni þínum* ("Are you now, Skalla-Grímr, going berserk on your son").²²¹

In the *Heiðreks saga*, Angantýr and his brothers pose a threat to their own people during their seizures⁽²²²⁾ just as Harthbenus does in the *Gesta*

217 *Historia Langobardorum*, I, 11: [. . .] *simulant se in castris suis habere cynocephalos, id est canini capitis homines. Divulgant apud hostes, hos pertinaciter bella gerere, humanum sanguinem bibere et, si hostem adsequi non possint, proprium potare cruorem* (Waitz (ed.) 1878, p. 59 f.). On this paragraph, see also the commentary by Höfler 1940, p. 108 f. and Much 1920; Much 1924.

218 With regard to the connections between animal behavior and warrior traditions, reference should be made above all to the passage in *Hrólfs saga kraka* in which Bǫðvarr bjarki fights in the form of a bear and "tears everything nearby with his teeth" (*ok allt, sem í nánd er, mylr hann með sínum tönnum*: Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 102 f.). In the *Völsunga saga*, Sigmundur bites Sinfjötli in the neck. This occurs at the time when the two heroes are roaming around in the guise of wolves (in *Völsunga saga* (Olsen (ed.) 1906/1908), p. 16).

219 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 210. Similar scenes also occur in other sagas, most notably *Egils saga einhenda* (Lagerholm (ed.) 1927, p. 15); *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (p. 331); *Hávarðar saga Ísfríðings* (Björn K. Þórólfsson (ed.) 1923, p. 54); *Völsunga saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 131); *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (p. 452).

220 *Jónsbók* (Ólafur Halldórsson (ed.) 1904), p. 52.

221 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 101 f. The reflexive form *hamask* refers to the *berserksgangr* (cf. *IED*, p. 236). Etymologically, of course, this verb derives from *hamr* ("form, outer appearance") with its reference to transformations.

222 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 5.

Danorum (VII, ii, 11). This uncontrollability gives the *berserksgangr* the impression of an ecstatic trance. In many sagas, this phenomenon is actually accompanied by spectacular physiological changes that express a state of extreme excitement: invulnerability to iron and fire, tenfold increase in strength, pallor of the face, exhaustion after the attack.

Invulnerable to weapons

According to Snorri, one of the characteristics of the *berserksgangr* is their invulnerability to weapons: *hvárki eldr né járn orti á þá* ("neither fire nor iron could harm them", *Ynglinga saga*, chapter VI). This motif also appears above all in the description of the battle in the Hafrsfjord. In *Egils saga*²²³ and *Grettis saga*²²⁴ it is mentioned that iron cannot harm the berserkers.

In the *Vatnsdæla saga* (ch. XLVI), Bishop Friðrekr recommends that the Icelanders arm themselves "with big sticks" (*með stóra lurka*) in order to "beat to death" (*berja þá til bana*) the two berserkers called Haukr, since "the iron will not bite them" (*því at þá bíta eigi járn*).²²⁵

Many sagas from all genres describe the invulnerability of the berserkers through weapons:²²⁶ *Svarfdæla saga* (chap. VII),²²⁷ *Eyrbyggja saga* (chap. XXV),²²⁸ *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (chap. II),²²⁹ *Njáls saga* (chap. CIII),²³⁰ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (chap. XXXI),²³¹ *Þorst- eins saga Víkingssonar* (chap. III),²³² *Ketils saga hængs* (chap. V),²³³ *Hrólfs saga Gautreks- sonar* (chap. XV-XVI),²³⁴ *Viktors saga ok Blávus* (chap. IX),²³⁵ *Sigurðar saga þøgla* (chap. XXIV),²³⁶ *Hektors saga* (chap. VI)²³⁷ etc.

Several elements merge together to reinforce this reputation of invulnerability: the recourse to ideas of the "evil eye", the influence of Odin magic and the belief in the power of animal transformation.

223 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 23: *engin var ósárr á konungsskipinu fyrir framan siglu, nema þeir, er eigi bitu járn, en þat váru berserkir*.

224 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 5: *bitu engi járn*.

225 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 125.

226 For a complete overview of this motif, see especially Boberg 1966 (motif F610.3.1: Invulnerable berserk) and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, p. 334.

227 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 142.

228 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 61.

229 Björn K. Þórólfsson / Guðni Jónsson (eds.) 1943, p. 6 f.

230 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1954, p. 267.

231 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 330.

232 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 391.

233 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 132.

234 Rafn (ed.) 1830, pp. 106, 110, 114 f.

235 Loth (ed.) 1962, p. 27.

236 Loth (ed.) 1963, p. 165.

237 Loth (ed.) 1962, p. 99.

This invulnerability can be attributed to various causes. The beliefs associated with the "evil eye" probably contributed to the development of this motif. The Old Norse sources attribute the ability blunt weapons to certain magically gifted individuals.²³⁸ In the *Gesta Danorum*, according to Saxo Grammaticus, Wisinnus (VI, v, 14) and Grimmo (VII, ii, 13), who behave like the animal warriors of the Old Icelandic sources, possess this ability.

The skald Egill Skalla-Grímsson possibly alludes to the "evil eye" when he describes the appearance of the berserker Ljótr: *alfeigum skýtr ægir augum* ("the terrible one stares with eyes consecrated to death").²³⁹ Egill nevertheless succeeds in cutting off his opponent's leg. In the course of a later duel, he lunges at Atli's neck again when the sword blows do not injure him. Atli, however, is not described as an animal warrior.²⁴⁰

Even if the "evil eye" attributed to the magicians rather than the berserkers, the blunting of weapons is an ability associated with Óðinn, as verse 148 of the *Hávamál* attests.⁽²⁴¹⁾ Snorri also confirms this tradition in his *Ynglinga saga*: Óðinn *kunni svá gera, at í orrostu urðu óvinir hans blindir eða daufir eða óttafullir, en vápnbitu eigi heldr en vendir*.⁽²⁴²⁾ ("Óðinn could cause his enemies to become blind or deaf or fearful in battle, and blunt their weapons so that they no longer bit"). This ability gives the berserkers special protection as "Óðinn's men" (*hans menn*). An episode in the *Ketils saga haengs* illustrates this special bond, which particularly benefits the Viking king Framarr: *þat hafði Óðinn skapat Framari, at hann bitu eigi járn*⁽²⁴³⁾ ("that Óðinn had bestowed on Framarr, that no iron bit him").

Wearing animal skins also contributes to the invulnerability of the berserkers. In the *Grettis saga* they are depicted with the following words: *þeir váru kallaðir, en á þá bitu engi járn*⁽²⁴⁴⁾ ("they were called Úlfheðnir, and no iron could bite them"). In the *Vatnsdæla saga*, the protective effect of fur clothing is mentioned even more clearly: *[. . .] þeir berserkir, er Úlfheðnar váru kal-laðir; þeir höfðu vargstakka fyrir brynjur*⁽²⁴⁵⁾ ("[. . .] the berserkers who were called Úlfheðnir; they had wolfskin combs for breasts"). The term *vargs-*

238 On this topic, see above all Falk 1914, p. 44 and Dillmann 2006, pp. 61-64.

239 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 203, Str. 37.

240 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 209 f.

241 *Hávamál*, Str. 148: *eggjar ec deifi / minna andscota, / bitað þeim vápn né velir*.

242 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 17.

243 *Ketils saga haengs*, ch. V, p. 132. In the course of this work, the elements that allow Framarr to be identified as a beast warrior have already been examined.

244 Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, p. 5.

245 Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24.

takkar also appears in the legendary version of the saga of Saint Óláfr: the wolf shirts made by Sami sorcerers for the companions Þórir hundr make the wearers invulnerable⁽²⁴⁶⁾

In the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, a fur coat protects the fearsome Rön- dólfr from injury: *Eigi bitu flest járn á ólpu þá, er hann var í* (ch. XXX).²⁴⁷ The protection offered by animal skins²⁴⁸ is probably linked to the motif of transformation or 'transmigration': Þóðvarr bjarki becomes invulnerable when he fights *kraka* in the form of a bear in *Hrólfs saga*.²⁴⁹ Transmigration seems to be closely linked to frenzy in the animal warriors: thus, in *Egils saga*, the mediopassive *hamask*, which formed starting from the noun *hamr* ('shape, outer form'), is used as a synonym for *ganga berserksgang*.²⁵⁰ This verb form, which can be associated with the phrase *skipta höfum*, simultaneously recalls the frenzy and the changing of the exterior: During his fits, the berserker is literally "beside himself". The invulnerability to fire can also be derived from this condition.

Insensitive to fire

According to Snorri Óðinnmen cannot be wounded by fire (*Yng-linga saga*, chap. VI). This motif is also exaggerated in medieval literature, as in the *Gesta Danorum*, in which the fiercest warriors eat red-hot coal without hesitation.²⁵¹ However, the sagas provide a more "realistic" picture that allows a coherent interpretation of the facts. A well-known consequence of the ecstatic trance is insensitivity to fire. The berserkers may have this amazing ability once they have reached the highest level of frenzy.

The rite of trial by fire, which intended to test the courage of those who submit to it, reinforces the reputation of invulnerability. The martial traditions take on a religious dimension at this moment. Some saga heroes swear never to flinch before iron or fire, as Hrólfr kraki: *hann hafði [. . .], heitit, að flýja hvorki eld né járn* (*Hrólfs saga*)

246 Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, p. 192: *Þórir hundr oc þæir xij. saman ero firir utan fylcingarnar oc lausir oc varo i vargskinzstakcum* ("Þórir hundr and his twelve men were together outside the order of battle and unrestrained, wearing wolfskin shirts").

247 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 322.

248 On the invulnerability that comes from disguising oneself as an animal, see *Ragnar's saga loðbrókar* (Olsen (ed.) 1906/1908), pp. 117-120, 156-159. It should also be noted that Grímr loðinkinni's hairy cheek cannot be wounded by swords (*Grím's saga loðinkinna*, p. 143).

249 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 102.

250 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 69. Cf. also *IED*, p. 236.

251 Cf. the seven sons of Sywaldus (*Gesta Danorum*, VII, ii, 7) or Harthbenus (VII, ii, 11).

kraka, ch. LXI).²⁵² The king's twelve warriors follow their leader's vow: Imprisoned at Aðils' court, the loyal companions stoically endure the blazing heat of the hearth before they pounce on their opponents and throw them into the .²⁵³

It can be assumed that the warriors of the Viking Age - following the example of these legendary figures - pledged never to flee "from iron or fire" the moment they joined a group of berserkers. Although the *Konungasögur* or the skaldic poetry provide no information about such rituals of taking up arms and formal oaths among the beast warriors of Haraldr hárfagri's time, this hypothesis seems quite probable based on other Icelandic sources.

In the *Íslendingasögur* and *Fornaldasögur* it is often reported how the berserkers strive to show the utmost contempt for pain and death at every public appearance. During the festivities of the winter season, these demonstrations of power are repeated: The raging animal warriors invade the hall and the guests, whom they frighten with their roars. Warlike dances and simulated fights can also be performed (as mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus). This includes the custom of 'firewalking' (cf. the Old Norse expression *vaða eld*).²⁵⁴ This test of courage probably consisted of jumping over the hearth's fire,²⁵⁵ a custom that can still be observed in the folk tradition of modern times albeit in a completely different context (think, for example, of jumping over St. John's fire). The analgesic effect associated with the ecstatic state of the *berserksgangr* undoubtedly facilitated the performance of these rituals and to reinforce the animal warriors' reputation for invulnerability. During the performance of this test of courage, the appearance of the racing berserkers, brandishing their weapons and howling like wolves, was particularly apt to impress onlookers. According to Fredrik Grøn, this behaviour shows above all the influence of a hysterical illness.²⁵⁶ Other researchers such as Lily Weiser-Aall emphasize the importance of the ecstatic trance in the beliefs and cults of many archaic societies.²⁵⁷ One of the many torments to which Óðinn is subjected in Old Norse mythology is fire (cf. *Grímnismál*, str. 1 and 2), which underlines the importance of the fire test in initiation rituals.

252 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 84.

253 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 84 f. This scene is also recounted in the *Skáldskaparmál*, where King Hrólfr's warriors are referred to as *berserkir* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 140).

254 *Svarfðæla saga*, ch. VII, p. 142 f.; *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. XVI (Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 114 f.)

255 Cf. *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), p. 141: *toc skiold siN ok kastapi aeldiN ok hliop yfir eldiN, meþan skioldriN braN, ok mælti eN: "Flyra sa eld er ifir hleypr"* ("he took his shield and threw it on the fire and ran over the fire while the shield was burning, saying thus: 'He does not flee the fire who runs over it'").

256 Grøn 1929a; 1929b.

257 Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 77 f.

can be guessed. For the animal warriors, the trial by fire was possibly a rite of integration that also the clearest demonstration of their invulnerability. The arrival of the Christian missionaries put an end to this tradition. Several Icelandic sources report how the berserkers are held in check by the priest Þangbrandr²⁵⁸ or the bishop Friðrekr²⁵⁹: The beast warriors fail to overcome the fires that blessed the men of God. Beyond their revealing character, such episodes show how closely the ecstatic trance of the *berserksgangr* was linked to pagan traditions in Iceland's collective memory.

Exceptional strength

While by the *berserksgangr*'s rage, the animal warriors show tremendous strength, as Snorri Sturluson confirms: *váru sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar* ("they were as strong as bears or boars", *Ynglinga saga*, chap. VI). The animal metamorphoses Snorri describes are reminiscent of a famous passage in the *Landnámabók* - the nocturnal battle of two Icelanders, Duðþakr and Stórolfr, in the guise of a bear and a bull.²⁶⁰ The Old Norse sources associate the adjective *hamrammr* (literally 'strong in relation to his *hamr*', meaning 'able to change his appearance, to transform') with both characters.

In the *Egils saga*, Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr perform their heroic deeds under the influence of the *berserksgangr* after sunset. In chapter XXVII, they defeat their opponent at nightfall; accompanied by their companions, they are seized by the fury of the beast warriors and 50 enemies.²⁶¹ In chapter XXX, Egill proves his extraordinary strength in the night: he manages to bring up a stone of considerable weight from the depths of the sea (it subsequently takes no less than four men to lift it).²⁶² In chapter XL, Skalla-Grímr has a fit of rage (*hamask*) during the dawn (*um kveldit eftir sólarfell*), which is directed against his son: He becomes so strong (*gerðist Grímr þá svá sterkur*) that he lifts up Egill's playmate and kills him by throwing him to the ground.²⁶³

In the *Heiðarvíga saga*, too, the berserkers Halli and Leiknir perform strenuous work during the night, which they have been entrusted with (cf. a

258 Cf. *Njáls saga*, chap. CIII, p. 267 f.

259 Cf. the reports in the *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. XLVI (Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 124), the *Kristni saga* (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Peter Foote (ed.) 2003, p. 9) and the *Þorvalds þáttur víðfjrla* (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Peter Foote (ed.) 2003, p. 69 f. and 93 f.).

260 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 355 f.

261 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 70.

262 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 78 f.

263 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 101.

similar episode in the *Eyrbyggja saga*).²⁶⁴ According to these sources, the physical strength of the beast warriors increases after sunset. The time of day at which the phenomenon is triggered also matches the nocturnal character that Old Icelandic literature ascribes to some cases of animal transformations.

Like other elements of the *berserksgangr*, the motif of extraordinary strength clearly refers to a kind of ecstatic trance⁽²⁶⁵⁾.

Facial pallor

Some animal warriors are by the paleness of their faces⁽²⁶⁶⁾ such as Ljótr inn bleiki, Egill Skalla-Grímsson's opponent.⁽²⁶⁷⁾ Some sources attribute a morbid character to this extreme paleness, which can possibly be interpreted as another symptom of the trance: In the *Fljótsdæla saga*, Gunnsteinn is described as *bleikr í andliti sem nár* ('pale in the face like a corpse').⁽²⁶⁸⁾ Although he is not explicitly described as a berserker, he falls into a frenzy (*hamask*).

Even if the paleness of the ancient Norse animal warriors is in all probability naturally caused by the ecstatic state of the *berserksgangr*, the custom of white body painting has been well attested since antiquity, both in a martial context and in connection with the idea of an army of the dead. In the ancient Greek sources that report on the war between the Thessalians and the Phocians in the 6th century BC (cf. Herodotus VIII, 27 and Pausanias X, 1, 11), the following stratagem is described: A troop of 600 selected brave Phocians, who had coated themselves and their weapons with plaster, rushed at night time at their terrified opponents, who thought they were facing a miracle and were slain. Ludwig Weniger (1906) compares this episode with Tacitus' account of the *feralis exercitus* of the Harii, who did not use light but rather dark colors (*nigra scuta, tincta corpora*) to surprise their enemies during nighttime attacks.²⁶⁹ Although some aspects of the berserker tradition can be traced back to the beliefs surrounding the army of the dead, it is important to note that the Harii did not use light colors.

264 *Heiðarvíga saga*, p. 222; *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), p. 61 f.

265 For further references concerning the extraordinary strength of the berserkers, see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001a, p. 333.

266 The description of beast warriors as *blámenn*, i.e. with dark facial skin, in the prehistoric sagas represents an opposite extreme. This is probably a purely literary motif intended to emphasize the strangeness and dangerousness of the berserkers.

267 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 203 f. Cf. the stanzas spoken by Egill (st. 38: *leik ek við hal bleikan*, st. 39: *leikum sárt við bleikan*). In another context, the attri- but *bleikr* can also refer to a man with light hair.

268 Jón Jóhanesson (ed.) 1950, p. 280.

269 *Germania*, XLIII.

and the mythical troop of the *einherjar*,²⁷⁰ the Old Norse sources provide no clear evidence of the use of war paint by the animal warriors.

Exhaustion and illness

The triggering of the *berserksgangr* quickly exhausts the strength of the animal warriors - which leads to a state of complete apathy immediately after the battle rage disappears.⁽²⁷¹⁾ The author of the *Egils saga* describes this phenomenon as follows:

Svá he says, at þeim mönnum væri farit, er hamrammir eru, eða þeim, er berserksgangr var á, at meðan þat var framit, þá váru þeir svá sterkir, at ekki helzk við, en fyrst, er af var ge- ngit, þá váru þeir ómáttkari en at vanða.²⁷²

(It is said that the men who could change their form, or those who went berserk, were so strong while the state lasted that nothing could withstand them, but as soon as it left them, they were weaker than usual).

The loss of energy after a seizure can have a fatal outcome for the berserker: Kveld-Úlfr, who is driven by frenzy during his night attack on Hallvarðr, feels so weak afterwards that he has to lie down in bed; a few days later he succumbs to an illness on board his ship (*Egils saga*, chap. XXVII).²⁷³ In *Svarfdœla saga* (chap. XIX), Þorsteinn svørfuðr goes into battle in animal form; he becomes bedridden shortly afterwards and dies the following spring.²⁷⁴ Although the appellative *berserkr* is not used in connection with Þorsteinn, his fate is strongly reminiscent of Kveld-Úlfr's.²⁷⁵ Berserkers often become easy prey for their opponents after they have been weakened and made vulnerable by their fit of rage: In this state, for example, Halli and Leiknir are slain by their lord Víga-styrr (*Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. XXVIII).²⁷⁶

270 Cf. Dumézil 1939, p. 81, who describes the berserkers as the "earthly doppelgangers" of the *einherjar* labeled.

271 For an overview of the sources, see above all Breen 1999a, p. 82.

272 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 70.

273 Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 70.

274 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.) 1956, p. 181 f. In this fight, a boar and a polar bear face each other (*gqltr* and *hvitabjörn*). Þorsteinn indicates that he took part in this fight.

275 In the same work (*Svarfdœla saga*, pp. 172-175) there is possibly another depiction of this motif: the animal warrior Klaufi, Þorsteinn's nephew, is killed by his enemies when he is resting after a seizure.

276 Einar, Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 70 f.

Some *sagnamenn* describe the faintness following the *berserksgangr* as a morbid condition - as evidenced by the expressions *í sóttum*,²⁷⁷ *sem eptir no- ckurs kys sottir*²⁷⁸ or *sem sottleira menn*⁽²⁷⁹⁾ (cf. the feminine *sótt*, "disease", Latin *morbus*).

When interpreting the Old Norse source material, two possibilities : On the one hand, exhaustion can be associated with the gift of transformation (i.e. the ability to make one's innermost being, one's *hamr*, appear on the outside - whether through a change in mental state or by actually assuming an animal form) (cf. the case of Þorsteinn svørfuðr or the drowsiness attributed to Kveld-Úlfr at the beginning of *Egils saga*); on the other hand, and this is probably the more 'rational' explanation, this apathy may also be a secondary effect of the fierceness of the frenzy (*Egils saga*, ch. XXVII). In the latter case, the *berserksgangr* can be seen as a mental disorder, which regarded as a "shameful" illness in Old Icelandic saga literature. In the *Vatnsdæla saga*, Þórir Ingimundarson, who is affected by this malady, feels deeply humiliated; the seizures he suffers are described in unambiguous terms: *mein* ("illness", "physical suffering", "harm")²⁸⁰ and *ótími* ("harm", "misfortune")⁽²⁸¹⁾.

The uncertainty in the distinction between the warlike *furor* and neurological (or even mental) illnesses undoubtedly reinforced the negative connotations of *berserksgangr* in the medieval world, as exemplified by the fits of rage attributed to Þrum-Ketill in the *Fljótsdæla saga*²⁸².

The irrepressibility of the *berserksgangr* and the fierceness and abruptness with which this ecstatic state manifested itself probably to a blurring of the boundaries between the tradition of animal warriors and a mental illness. This warlike frenzy, which in Iceland - in contrast to pre-Christian Norwegian society - no longer any heroic or cultic legitimacy, was reduced to hysterical fits in the eyes of the Icelanders.

In the *Kristinna laga þáttur*, which has survived as part of the Old Icelandic law text *Grá- gás* ("Grey Goose"), the *berserksgangr* is explicitly condemned as a punishable offense:

277 *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. XVI (Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 115).

278 *Heiðreks saga*, ch. III (Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 9).

279 *Heiðreks saga*, ch. V (Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 97).

280 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, pp. 83 and 97.

281 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 98.

282 Jón Jóhannesson (ed.) 1950, p. 220.

Ef maþr gengr berserks gang, oc varþar honvm þat fiorbavgs garþ. oc sva varþar kavrlvmer hia ero staddir. nema þeir hefti hann at. þa varþar aungvm. ef þeir vinna heftan hann at. Enn ef optaR kemr at. varþar fiorbavgs garþ.²⁸³

(If a man goes berserk, he is punished with a three-year banishment [literally: "life-ring fence", an. *fjörbaugsgarðr*], as are the men who are present if they do not stop him. Then none of them will be punished if they succeed in stopping him. However, if it happens more often, it is punished with a life-ring fence).

This text belongs to a section probably written at the beginning of the 12th century⁽²⁸⁴⁾ which lists the penal sanctions for practising pagan customs. Here, however, no reference is made to pre-Christian beliefs in connection with animal warriors, such as disguises or transformations - a tradition which in turn is passed down in the Old Icelandic saga literature, albeit mostly only implicitly, as evidenced by the frequent use of terms based on an. *hamr* ("form", "outward appearance") in relation to the *berserksgangr*.

2 *Berserksgangr* and the vocabulary of transformation

The prehistoric sagas and the *Riddarasögur* often depict the berserkers with fairytale-like features. In some sources, these figures are even portrayed as monstrous creatures that undergo countless transformations - such as Grímr ægir in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*.²⁸⁵

In the kings' sagas and the *Íslendingasögur*, on the other hand, these unrealistic characteristics are never associated with the beast warriors (see chapter IV above). The etymological interpretation of the terms used in these texts in connection with the description of the *berserksgangr* nevertheless points to the idea of a transformation of the exterior (cf. the adjective *hamrammr*, the expression *eigi einhamr*, the mediopassive *hamask* etc.).

These expressions, when referring to the animal warriors, denote a change in behavior whose physical manifestation (rage, roaring, pallor, etc.) is not accompanied by an animal transformation. Is this a late interpretation that in the context of medieval Christian Iceland? Is the "rational" image of the angry warrior being replaced by more archaic ideas that presuppose a belief in the Berserker's ability to transform?

283 Vilhjálmur Finsen (ed./trans.) 1852, 1, p. 23. This edition mainly follows the reading of the manuscript *Gks 1157 fol*, *Konungsbók (Codex Regius)*, which dates to the middle of the 13th century.

284 Cf. the commentary by Heusler (transl.) 1937, p. xviii.

285 Rafn (ed.) 1830, pp. 241 and 342.

Benjamin Blaney supports this view in his 1972 work with an argument based primarily on the tradition of the *Egils saga*: "Just as the ability to change shape diminished with each generation of Egil's family, so the terms used to indicate this change also weakened and changed their meaning. The terms *hamramr*, *eigi einhamr* and *hamask*, which originally indicated a physical change, probably no longer did so by the mid-thirteenth century."⁽²⁸⁶⁾ According to Benjamin Blaney, the progressive loss of the *ability to berserksgangr* in the family of the skald Egill corresponds to the decline of the belief in transformation.²⁸⁷

However, the *Egils saga* never describes Egill's ancestors in animal form, and Kveld-Úlfr is only referred to as *mjök hamrammr*.⁽²⁸⁸⁾ How can this formulation be interpreted?

In Old Norse literature, the adjective *hamrammr* refers primarily to the ecstatic trance of the *berserksgangr*: [. . .] *þeim mǫnnum væri farit, er ham-rammir eru, eða þeim, er berserksgangr var á*.²⁸⁹ At the same time, however, this term can also refer to transformations performed by people with magical abilities or knowledge. Stórolfr and Dufþakr fight each other in the *Landnámabók* in the guise of a bear and a bull.²⁹⁰ They are both *hamrammr*²⁹¹ and well versed in the art of magic (*mjök trylldr* and *ffjolkunnigr*²⁹²); however, they are not depicted as berserkers. This passage is often associated with the *fylgjur* belief: it was not a "real" animal transformation, but merely the battle between the *fylgjur* of Stórolfr and Dufþakr, who appear detached from the human body in animal form. This example clearly shows that the "excursion soul" is "experienced in a very material, physical way" in Norse beliefs.²⁹³

The respective use of the term *hamrammr* in different contexts shows that the *berserksgangr* and the ability to transform were seen in medieval Scandinavia as effects of one and the same gift, which was, however, used to varying degrees. In both cases, the process influences the "form of the soul" (*hamr*).

286 Blaney 1972, p. 63a.

287 On the subject of animal transformation in the Old Norse sources, cf. e.g. Ellis Davidson 1978.

288 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 4.

289 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), ch. XXVII, p. 70.

290 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 355 f.

291 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 355: *hann [Dufþakr] var hamrammr mjök, ok svá var Stórolfr Hængsson*.

292 *Órms þátr Stórolfssonar* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991), p. 398: *Dufþakr var mikill ok mjök trylldr, svá at hann var eigi einhamr*; p. 401: *Stórolfr [. . .] var [. . .] kallaðr ffjolkunnigr*.

293 Hasenfratz 2005, p. 39. For a summary of the rich scholarly literature on the *Fylgjuglauben*, see Röhn 1998.

In *Íslendingasögur*, however, the people referred to as "sorcerers" have the ability to perform a complete transformation *ad libitum* or to send their *fylgja* in animal form out of their bodies to distant places, while the *berserks- gangr* manifests itself only as an uncontrollable fit of rage.

Although the "transformation" of the animal warriors is ultimately of a purely psychological nature, it is nevertheless a terrifying phenomenon in which the unleashing of the most brutal violence and the insensitivity to weapons and fire merge. Both the wearing of animal furs and the imitation of wolf howls or bear roars allow the berserker to "second self" that resides within him (cf. the expression *eigi ein- hamr*).²⁹⁴ In this context, the pagan mentality makes no fundamental distinction between the concept of an actual transformation and a change in behavior. Such a procedure can be observed in many archaic mask cults, where the mask wearers feel themselves to be mediators of a connection with sacred, extra-human powers and are also perceived as such by the spectators (cf. the formula frequently used in ethnographic literature: "becoming one with the masks").²⁹⁵

While modern rationalism has removed the supernatural from the "real" world While the Norse religion tries to exclude the world from the world, the old Norse, pre-Christian religion takes a completely different path. In this world of imagination, the excitement in the *mountain warrior* makes a deep impression on the spirits. A change in physical appearance is not necessary for the animal warrior to be perceived as a being fundamentally different from the mortal community. The "metamorphosis" thus takes place without a transformation of the body necessarily being noticeable.

When the furor-stricken *berserkir* or *úlfheðnar* give free rein to the wildness that drives them, their animal soul is revealed. Under the influence of the ecstatic trance, the *hamr* reveals itself: the fighters become similar to bears and wolves. Since these fits of rage occur suddenly, the sources do not attribute any "shamanistic" technique to the animal warriors.²⁹⁶

The beast warriors possessed Óðinn-fury spirit are no longer themselves, but form the followers of the god of the dead and the god of war. The boundary between the sphere of the dead and that of the living is dissolved: On

294 Dumézil 1939, p. 82: "... les berserkir d'Odhinnn ne ressemblent pas seulement à des loups, à des ours, etc., par la force et par la férocité; ils étaient à quelque degré ces animaux même. Their extasy extériorisait un être second qui vivait en eux, et les artifices de costume (cf. les *tincta corpora* des Harii), les déguisements auxquels font évidemment allusion le nom de berserkir et son synonyme *úlfhéðnar* ("hommes à peaux de loup") ne servaient qu'à aider, à affirmer cette métamorphose aux amis et aux ennemis épouvantés...".

295 On this question, see the summary by Höfler 1973a, p. 43 f.

296 Cf. Eliade 1968, p. 303.

On the battlefield, the berserkers see themselves as representatives of the heavenly warriors - the *schar der einherjar*, the chosen fighters of the Lord of Valhalla⁽²⁹⁷⁾.

This identification process is probably repeated during the winter festivities dedicated to the cult of the ancestors (hence the frequent occurrence of berserkers in the Yule season). The eschatological myth of *Hjaðningavíg* ("Battle of the *Hjaðningar*", see chapters V and VI above) is evidence of the very old connection between the customs of the animal warriors and the. The *Hjaðningar* (i.e. "Heðinn and his own"),²⁹⁸ whose name recalls the wearing of fur clothing (cf. the noun *heðinn*), fight according to the example of the *einherjar* until the end of time.²⁹⁹

In other sources, the "Field of the Undead" (*Ódáinsakr*) is located in the kingdom of *Glæsisvellir* ("Shining Fields")³⁰⁰, ruled over by King Guðmundr, son of Úlfheðinn and father of Heiðrekr Úlfhamr (Úlfhamr: "[he who] [possesses] form (or soul) of a wolf").³⁰¹ In connection with the cult of the mythical figure of Guðmundr (to whom the Norwegian folk tradition passes on connections to Yule, among other things)⁽³⁰²⁾, Jan de Vries writes quite correctly: "Supernatural beings that have a wolf's pelt or even a wolf's shape as a characteristic feature probably belong to the male cults and may then also be placed, albeit at a proper distance, on a line with Odin."³⁰³ By assuming the appearance and behavior of a wild animal, the berserker clad in animal skins finally enters the sphere of numinous powers. This symbolism possibly refers to a cult of the dead, which the later tradition of the Wild Hunt still recalls with the appearance of theriomorphic demons (including dogs and wolves) in the ghostly procession of dead warriors. The significance of the wolf in connection with ancestor worship is also emphasized by the frequent use of the element *-úlfr-* in Old Norse

297 Dumézil 1939, p. 84: "Les Einherjar ne sont pas seulement la transposition mythique de certaines 'sociétés de guerriers'. Ou plutôt l'Autre Monde et le monde terrestre sont, sur ce point, indissolublement liés: chez Oðinn, les Einherjar ne sont rien de plus et rien de moins que ce qu'ils étaient chez leur maître terrestre. Everything happens as if the sole fact of having adopted this form of existence on earth had assured them this form of immortality."

298 Dillmann (transl.) 2005, p. 210.

299 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), p. 155: *sva er sagt iqvæþvm, at Hjaðningar skvilo sva biþa ragna rökrs* ("in the songs it is said that the *Hjaðningar* should endure this until the Ragna-rök"). On the symbolic content of the dog and wolf in connection with the cult of the dead, see Höfler 1934, p. 55 f.; Kretschmar 1938; Paul 1981, pp. 184-188. On the interpretation of the Old Norse eschatological tradition, see most recently Hultgård 2017.

300 *Heiðreks saga* (Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924), ch. I, p. 1.

301 *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*, chap. V and XII, cf. Tietz (ed./trans.) 2012, pp. 49 and 76.

302 Cf. de Vries 1970, 1, p. 387; Lid 1929, pp. 158-61.

303 de Vries 1970, 2, p. 284 f. Cf. also Höfler 1952a, p. 335 f., note 264; Höfler 1973a, p. 172 f.

³⁰⁴Christianity, which was established in Norway from the 11th century onwards, naturally condemned this depiction of animal ferocity as well as certain warlike customs that were deeply rooted in paganism. The Christian kings logically condemned the behavior of the berserkers, who thus lost any claim to legitimacy and prestige within the Scandinavian elites.³⁰⁵ By the time the Icelandic sagas were written down, the tradition of animal warriors had long since ceased to be part of everyday Scandinavian life. The trance of the *berserksgangr* is downgraded to a pathological change in behavior. As literary figures, berserkers are increasingly relegated to the world of legend. The reports of animal transformations in medieval sources necessarily involve the intervention of magic. At the same time, however, the concept of the werewolf gradually replaced the image of the animal warrior in the collective imagination. This development is particularly evident in the figure of Kveld-Úlfr. However, the words and phrases that go back to the term *hamr* and are used in connection with the description of the *berserksgangr* in the Old Icelandic sagas are reminiscent - albeit in a very attenuated form - of pre-Christian beliefs.³⁰⁶

The noun *hamr* and the phrase *skipta hqumum*

The meaning of the masculine noun *hamr* (derived from germ. **hama(n)-*, "shell", "skin", "outer form"⁽³⁰⁷⁾) refers both literally and figuratively to the exterior of living beings - humans, animals or supernatural beings³⁰⁸.

In its material meaning, this term refers to the plumage of birds (or a garment decorated with feathers: the *fiðrhamr* of the goddess

304 Cf. among others the runic inscription from Istaby (DR 359, Mjällby parish, Blekinge, 7th century), on which three persons with the names 'battle wolf' (Hǫpuwulfr), 'sword wolf' (*Hæruwulfr, in the spelling hAeruwulafiR: [son of] Heruwulf) and 'army wolf' (hAriwulafa, accusative of *Hariwulfr). The name hAriwolAfR on another stone in the Lister region, the stone of Stentofte (DR 357), next to the name hǫpuwolAfR - this is also found on the neighboring stone of Gummarp (DR 358, in the form hǫpuwolAfA). It is probably the same group of people who are connected by common ancestors (cf. Jansson 1987, p. 20 f.; Williams 2001, pp. 508-512). See also Sundqvist / Hultgård 2004, pp. 583-602.

305 Cf. above all the episode in the legendary *Óláfs saga* in which the two berserkers are converted by the king: Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, pp. 176 and 182.

306 For the use of these terms in connection with the *berserksgangr*, see Maurer 1856, pp. 101-118; Gering 1902, pp. 12-15.

307 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 216.

308 Cf. the definition in *IED* and Fritzner 1886-1896, 2nd ed.

Freyja;³⁰⁹ cf. also the composites *krákuhamr*,³¹⁰ *arnarhamr*,³¹¹ *alptarhamr*,³¹² *fugls-hamr* and *gásarhamr*³¹³) or an animal skin (cf. the two *úlfahamir* discovered by Sig-mundur and Sinfjötli in the *Völsunga saga*).³¹⁴

In most cases, however, the word refers to the "outer shell of the soul in the co The term *hamr* is connected with the Old Norse idea of the "excursion soul", which was described by the Swiss philologist Dag Strömbäck as "the idea of the soul as a highly mobile and powerful element in man".⁽³¹⁵⁾ The term *hamr* thus stands for the physical aspect under which the soul manifests itself, especially during an animal transformation. François-Xavier Dillmann proposes this definition: "forme extérieure de l'âme", "apparence prise lors d'une métamorphose".³¹⁶ In the *Strengleikar*, the Old Norse *hamr* translates the French "semblance de beste", which occurs in one of the *Lais de Marie de France (Bisclaret)*⁽³¹⁷⁾

The Old Norse *hamr* (cf. also the related form *hams*, "snakeskin", "fruit skin")³¹⁸ derives from the Indo-European root *^hkem, "to cover", "to cover" (cf. late Lat. *camisia* - a borrowing from germ. **hamiþja*, "hemd").³¹⁹ In modern usage, *hamr* also refers to the afterbirth (cf. mnd. *ham* and English *heam*). According to Jan de Vries,⁽³²⁰⁾ Although the word *hamr* in the meaning "afterbirth" was not attested in the Old Norse sources, this modern use of the word is still reminiscent of an ancient conception of the soul, according to which the soul that has escaped from the body is not an immaterial being, but takes on a physical form.

Furthermore, in certain (modern) Icelandic metaphorical expressions *hamr* stands for the character, the mood, the state of mind: *að vera í góðum, ilium, vondum, ham* ("to be in a good, bad, dismal frame of mind or mood"); *ferast í annan ham* ("to enter into another frame of mind").³²¹ The adjective

309 *Þrymsqviða*, Str. 3, 5 and 9.

310 *Völsunga saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829), p. 118.

311 *Vafþrúðnismál*, Str. 37.

312 In the prose introduction to *Völundarkviða*, in connection with Valkyries (Prose, p. 116).

313 Cf. *IED*, p. 236 f.

314 *Völsunga saga*, ch. VIII (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 130). These two enchanted wolf pelts cause the transformation of the two heroes who wear them.

315 Strömbäck 1975, p. 22; see also Strömbäck 1935, pp. 160-190.

316 Dillmann 2006, p. 245, note 26.

317 *Strengleikar* (Cook / Tveitane (eds./trans.) 1979), p. 88. *Lais de Marie de France* (Warnke / Köhler (eds.) 1885), p. 84 (iv. 286).

318 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 208.

319 Cf. Pokorny 1959-1969, 1, p. 556 f.

320 de Vries 1970, 1, p. 224.

321 *IED*, P. 237.

hams-lauss denotes an angry person: "a person out of his mind from restlessness or passion, the metaphor from one who cannot recover his own skin, and roves restlessly in search of it".³²² In the Old Norse sources, several words formed from *hamr* (*hamramr*, *hamask* etc.) evoke the idea of "rage", "frenzy" and "madness", especially in connection with *berserksgangr*. Gerard Breen has observed that this a special feature of the Old Norse and Scandinavian languages:

In no other Indo-European language area do the words derived the root **k^hem* have such a meaning³²³.

The word *hamr* also occurs in the phrase *skipta hǫmum* (literally: "to change form"). This expression does not refer directly to the berserkers' fit of rage, but to the gift of transformation, which is attributed to the god Óðinn in particular (see chapter VI above).

The expression *skipta hǫmum* also describes the magical procedure by which the appearance of another person can be assumed.³²⁴ In the *Vǫlsunga saga*, Signý assumes the form of a sorceress in order to be able to visit her brother Sigmundr without being recognized by him.³²⁵ The phrases *víxla hǫmum* (*Gripisspá*, Str. 43), *víxla litum* (*Gripisspá*, Str. 37) and *skipta litum* (*Gripisspá*, Str. 38; *Vǫlsunga saga*, chapters VII and XXVII) have the same meaning.

In the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*³²⁶, the expression *skipta hǫmum* is used in connection with the berserker Grímr ægir, who the ability to change his appearance so quickly that the audience can hardly follow him: *hann [. . .] skipti hǫmum svá skjótt, at varla festi auga á* ("he [. . .] changed his shape so quickly that the eye could hardly make it out"). The behavior of this legendary figure is reminiscent Óðinntransformations in the *Ynglinga saga*.

In the *Íslendingasögur* or the *Konungasögur*, the words *skipta hǫmum* are never used together with a "realistic" description of the *berserksgangr*. The *sagnamenn* use a more ambiguous terminology in this context, in which the idea of frenzy dominates over the idea of transformation (cf. the adjective *hamrammr* and verb form *hamask*).

The adjective *hamrammr*

The adjective *hamrammr* (literally: "strong in relation to the *hamr*", cf. the adjective *rammr*, "powerful", "magical")³²⁷ occurs in the *Landnámabók* and in a

322 IED, P. 237.

323 Breen 1999a, p. 39.

324 Cf. Ström 1961b.

325 *Vǫlsunga saga*, ch. VIII (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 128).

326 Rafn (ed.) 1830, pp. 241 and 342.

327 Cf. also the definition by Dag Strömbäck 1935, p. 162, note 2: "stark med avseende på sin hamn, som har en stark hamn".

limited number of Icelandic sagas. Despite its etymology, the word is rarely used to describe an animal transformation.

In the various versions of the *Landnámabók*, seven men are referred to as *hamrammir*: Þórarinn korni Grímkelson,³²⁸ Vékell enn hamrammi,³²⁹ Oddr Arngeirsson,³³⁰ Dufþakr í Dufþaksholti,³³¹ Stórólf Hængsson,³³² Þorkell bundinfóti³³³ and Óláfr tvennumbrúni.³³⁴ Only Dufþakr and Stórólf are explicitly reported to turn into a wild animal. Oddr Arngeirsson, on the other hand, does not have this ability, even though he *became hamrammr* after eating the flesh of a bear.

It is true that the participle *hamra- maðr*, which is related to the adjective *hamrammr*, refers to a monstrous transformation in the half-mythical, half-heroic context of *Sörla saga sterka*: *ok við þetta hamaðist Tófi [.] brast hann þá í dreka líking, af því hann var mjök hamramaðr*⁽³³⁵⁾ ("and thus Tófi [. . .] he broke into the form of a dragon, for he was very capable of transformation"). In the *Íslendingasögur*, however, no one is referred to as *hamrammr* (Kveld,³³⁶ Skalla-Grímr and his companions³³⁷ and Qnundr Ánason³³⁸ in the *Egils saga*, Þorkell silfri³³⁹ in the *Vatnsdæla saga*, Óláfr tvennumbrúni in the *Flóamanna saga*³⁴⁰ or Galti³⁴¹ in the *Gull-Þóris saga*), the ability to take on the appearance of a wild animal or a supernatural being.

In some sources, the epithet *inn hamrammi* also appears (sometimes also in the corrupted form *inn handrammi*),³⁴² borne, for example, by Vígi inn hamrammi in the *Kormáks saga*³⁴³ or by Úlfhamr inn hamrammi (whose descendants are called, Úlfhamr, Úlfheðhinn and Björn blásiða) in the *Harðar saga*³⁴⁴

328 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 110.

329 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 231.

330 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 287.

331 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), pp. 347 and 355.

332 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 355.

333 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 351.

334 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 377.

335 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 423 f.

336 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), pp. 4 and 70.

337 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 62.

338 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 212.

339 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 110.

340 Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991, p. 265.

341 *Gull-Þóris saga* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991), p. 221.

342 *Tanni inn handrammi* in *Heiðarvíga saga* (ch. XXVIII, p. 298); *Hárvarðr enn handrammi* in *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum* (ch. V, p. 12). Cf. Maurer 1856, p. 108.

343 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 226.

344 *Harðar saga* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991), p. 46.

becomes. The name, which also appears in the *Úlfhams rímur*⁽³⁴⁵⁾ from around 1400, naturally recalls the naming traditions of the Germanic animal warriors.

In *Egils saga*, the term *hamrammr* clearly refers to the *berserksgangr*. The two concepts are presented as identical (cf. *Egils saga*, chap. XXVII: [. . .] *þeim monnum [. . .], er hamrammir eru, eða þeim, er ber- serksgangr var á*).³⁴⁶ In the same chapter, the feminine noun *ham-remi*³⁴⁷ also occurs: *af honum gekk hamremmin*.

The expression *eigi einhamr*

The expression *eigi einhamr*⁽³⁴⁸⁾ which the adverb *eigi* (Latin: *non*) with the adjective *ein- hamr*, literally stands for a person who is "not one", i.e. "who does not have only one form". In Icelandic sagas, this phrase usually refers to people who are notorious for their difficult character:

Þormórðr hét maðr [. . .]. Var þat kallat, at hann væri eigi einhamr, þótti hverjum þeira ok verst við hann at eiga.³⁴⁹

(Þormórðr was the name of a man [. . .] It was said that he was not stoned, and everyone thought that there was nothing worse than having to deal with him).

The phrase *eigi einhamr* thus often a bad reputation, as in the *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*, in which Grimkel expresses the wish that his son Hǫrð, whose uncle is depicted as *eigi einhamr*, should not receive the family inheritance (an allusion to the common belief in the Old Germanic realm that a child prefers to look after his mother's brother).³⁵⁰ This episode can also be linked to Þórir Ingimundarson's statements in the *Vatnsdæla saga*: Even though he himself is affected by the *berserksgangr*, Þórir regards it as a flaw.³⁵¹ In *Finnboga saga*, a certain Þorvaldr moðskegg, who is referred to as *eigi ein- hamr*, possesses extremely repulsive traits:

345 This text is an adaptation of a lost prehistoric saga. A prose version of the *Úlfhams rímur* was written in the 19th century (*Úlfhams saga*).

346 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 70.

347 Cf. *IED*, p. 237: "the state of being hamrammr".

348 On the ideas of the soul associated with this Old Norse expression, cf. e.g. Bödl 2005, p. 109 f.

349 *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* (Björn K. Þórólfsson / Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1943), p. 292 f.

350 *Harðar saga* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991), p. 28.

351 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), pp. 83 and 97 f.

Þorvaldr hét maðr; hann var kallaðr moðskegg [. . .]. Hann var gamall ok óvinsæll mjök. Hann þótti vera illmenni mikit ok kallaðr eigi einhamr [. . .]. Var hann orsóttur við at eiga ok leiðendr mjök.³⁵²

(Þorvaldr was the name of a man; he was called Moðskegg [. . .]. He was old and very unpopular. He was thought to be a great scoundrel and was not called stalwart [. . .]. He was difficult to deal with and very unpleasant).

Þorvaldr is even compared to a *tröll* ("troll").³⁵³ The eponymous hero of the saga, Finnbogi, finally kills him by tearing open his throat with his teeth. Þorvaldr, who is described as *eigi einhamr*, demonstrates such fearsome strength that it seems impossible to defeat him by normal means. The scene is naturally reminiscent of the duel between Egill and Atli in the *Egils saga* (both texts describe the victor's decisive gesture with the same words: *beit í sundr í honum barkann*,⁽³⁵⁴⁾ "he bites his throat"). The sources also mention another special characteristic: people who considered *eigi einhamr* or *hamrammir*.³⁵⁵ quick movements. This ability, which is probably linked to the idea of 'soul travel', is, for example, in connection with Oddr

Arngeirsson in the *Landnámabók*: Oddr, who has become *hamramr mjök* after eating the flesh of a bear that had killed his father and brother, crosses the western part of Iceland in just a few hours to support his sister, whom the population wants to stone to death for witchcraft (*fyrir fjolkyngi ok trollskað*).³⁵⁶ In the *Eyrbyggja saga*, one of Snorri's companions, Þrándr stígandi,⁽³⁵⁷⁾ covers an extraordinary distance in a single day. This nimbleness seems to be based not only on natural causes, but also on the "several figures" that Þrándr supposedly

352 Cf. *Finnboga saga*, p. 299.

353 Cf. *Finnboga saga*, p. 300.

354 Cf. *Finnboga saga*, p. 300 and *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 210.

355 That both expressions can refer to the same phenomenon can be seen, among other things, from an examination of the readings that occur in the different manuscripts of *Egils saga*: In the *Möðruvallabók* it is reported about Qnundr Ánason that "there was no unanimous opinion as to whether he was not *hamrammr*" (*eigi var um þat einmælt, at hann væri eigi hamrammr*); in the *Wolfenbüttelbók* and the *Ketilsbók* it is again mentioned that "many people were of the opinion that he was not *hamrammr*" (*ok var þat margra manna mál, at han væri eigi einhamr*). Cf. *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 212, note 3; *Egils saga* (Guðmundur Magnússon (ed.) 1809), p. 514, note. h; *Egils saga* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1886/1888), p. 246; *Egils saga* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1924), p. 222, note 11; Dillmann 2006, p. 245, note 29.

356 *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968), p. 286 f.

357 The epithet *stígandi* literally means 'the walker', 'one who walks with great strides'; cf. also Þorbjörn stígandi in the *Hænsa-Þóris saga*, p. 12 f. The latter also seems to possess a strange ability: *Þat er mælt, at Þorbjörn væri eigi allr jafnan, þar sem hann var sénn*. ("It is said that Þorbjörn was not always quite where he was seen.").

possesses, at least as long as he is still a heathen (*hann [. . .] var kallaðr eigi einhamr, meðan hann var heiðinn, en þá tók af flestum tröllskap, er skirðir váru.*³⁵⁸ -"He [. . .] was not stoned when he was a heathen, but most of them lost their magic power when they were baptized").

These testimonies confirm the importance of the belief in an "excursion soul" in Old Norse religion, and the berserkers in particular are *eigi einhamr*, as also clear in the following formulation: *Bárekr [. . .] var berserkr, svá at menn kölluðu hann eigi einhama.*³⁵⁹ In the *Eyrbyggja saga*, the beast warriors Halli and Leiknir are also described as *eigi einhama*.³⁶⁰ The extraordinary strength attributed to these figures makes it possible, by way of comparison, to assess the physical attributes of fighters who do not this gift: In the *Finnboga saga*, Finnbogi is described as one of the strongest ishama "of those who have only one form" (*þeira er einhamir hafa verit*)³⁶¹.

In a story from the *Flateyjarbók* (*Orms þáttur Stórólfs-sonar*), Stó- rólfr and Dufþakr are described as *eigi einhamr*, who said in the *Landnámabók* to be *hamrammir* and fight each other in the form of a bear and a bull. The *Orms þáttur stórólfs-sonar*, on the other hand, provides no information about an animal transformation of the two Icelanders, but credits them with knowledge in the field of magic.³⁶²

Although the etymological interpretation of the expression *eigi einhamr* is reminiscent of the idea of transformation, this expression is more often used to describe people who are feared because of their (presumed) magical knowledge, their fickle character or their fits of rage, without necessarily having the ability to take on animal form.

The mediopassive verb *hamask*

The mediopassive *hamask* rarely refers to an animal transformation. Within Old Norse literature, there is only one that undoubtedly to this meaning. A prose passage from the *Helgaqviða Higrvarðssonar* tells how

358 Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 165 f.

359 *Brot af Þórðar sögu hreðu*, ch. II, p. 234.

360 Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 74. In *AM 448 4°* and *AM 447 4°* the reading *eigi einhama* occurs, while other manuscripts (*AM 445b 4°*, *Wolfenbüttelbók*, *AM 309 4°*) give the reading *eigi einhamir* (cf. Dillmann 2006, p. 245, note 26; *Eyrbyggja saga* (Scott / Louis-Jensen (ed.) 2003), pp. 138 f.).

361 *Finnboga saga*, ch. XXXVI, p. 318. For comparisons of a similar nature, see also *Orms þáttur Stórólfs-sonar* (*Flateyjarbók*, 1, p. 524) and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* (p. 261).

362 Guðbrandr Vigfússon / Unger (ed.) 1860, p. 521: *Storulfr uar allra manna sterkazstr ok þat var allra manna mal at hann væri æigi æinhamr*; p. 522: *Dufþakr uar mikill ok miog trylldr suo at hann uar æigi æinhamar*. Cf. also Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991, pp. 398 and 401.

Jarl Fránmarr assumes the form of an eagle: *Fránmarr iarl hafði hamaz í arnar líki*⁽³⁶³⁾ ('Jarl Fránmarr had transformed himself into the shape of an eagle').

In the *Sqrla saga sterka* (ch. VIII)³⁶⁴, the verb *hamask* is only indirectly connected with the gift of transformation: The animal warrior Tófi, who described as *hamramaðr*, transforms into a dragon (*í dreka líking*) after giving free rein to his rage (*ok við þetta hamaðist Tófi*). *Hamaðist* (past tense of *ha- mask*) here refers to the berserker's trance, not the transformation into an animal, which Tófi only after he has unleashed his rage.

The verb *hamask* usually has the meaning of "to give in to a fit of anger". This is particularly the case in two episodes of *Egil's saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. In chapter XXVII, Kveld-Úlfr and his men are overcome by the fury of the beast warriors when they board their opponents' ship: [*. . .*] *hann óð aprt til lyptinga- rinnar, ok svá er sagt, at þá hamaðisk hann, ok fleiri váru þeir fǫrunautar hans, er þá hǫmuðusk* ("[. . .] he ran aft to the quarterdeck, and so it is said that he fell into a berserk rage there, and there were several of his companions who fell into a berserk rage there").³⁶⁵ For *hǫmuðusk*, one manuscript offers the reading *at berserks- gangr kom á*.³⁶⁶

In chapter XL *Skalla-Grímr* rages against his own son Egill, but is held back by his nurse Þorgerðr Brák: *Hamask þú nú, Skalla- Grímr, at syni!* ("You are now going berserk, *Skalla-Grímr*, towards your son!").³⁶⁷

The battle between Þórir and Gallti in the *Gull-Þóris saga* proves to be extremely brutal (*var þeirra atgangr hinn harðasti*): One of the two combatants is overcome by frenzy (*hann hamaðisk*), while his opponent reveals himself to be *hamrammr*.³⁶⁸ In this context, the terms *hamaðisk* and *hamrammr* clearly describe the lust for battle that seizes these warriors at the moment of strife.

The verb *hamask*, which is always used in the same sense, sometimes refers to people who are also called *eigi einhamr* - such as Gunnstein in the *Fljótsdæla saga*⁽³⁶⁹⁾.

363 Neckel / Kuhn (eds.) 1983, p. 142.

364 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 423 f.

365 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 68 f.

366 *Egils saga* (Guðmundur Magnússon (ed.) 1809), p. 122, note h.

367 *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933), p. 101 f. Similarly in the *Svarfdæla saga* (chap. XV, p. 160 f.), in which Gríss calls the beast warrior Klaufi by his name in order to calm his rage. According to Blaney 1972, p. 57, note 60, this procedure must be associated with popular werewolf traditions (cf. on this question Andree 1878, p. 63 and Hertz 1862, p. 84 f.).

368 In *Harðar saga* (Þórhallur Vilmundarson / Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) 1991), p. 221.

369 Jón Jóhanesson (ed.) 1950, p. 279 f.

In several *Fornaldarsögur*, *hamask* is used for characters referred to as berserker (Jólgeir or Grímr ægir in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*)⁽³⁷⁰⁾.

Two other expressions that are not etymologically related to *hamr* are often used as parallel forms to the mediopassive *hamask* and show a clear relationship to each other. These are the verbs *æða* ("to make wild", cf. also the mediopassive *æðask*, "to become wild, furious, angry", or the adjective *óðr*, "angry") and *reiðask* ("to become angry", cf. also the adjective *reiðr*, "angry").

In *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*⁽³⁷¹⁾, the animal warrior Jökull rages against Gunnarr (*Jökull æddi þá á móti Gunnari allgrímliga*), and his brother Svartr, also a berserker, "falls into a rage like a troll" (*hamast sem tröll*). Rǫndólfr in the *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* also roars "like a troll" when he gets angry (*Röndólfr [. . .] grenjaði sem tröll, þegar hann reiddist*).⁽³⁷²⁾ He is also described as *hamaðr*. Several of Rǫndólfr's characteristics are clearly similar to those of the animal warriors, such as the wearing of a fur (*ólpa*), which prevents the weapons from biting (*eigi bitu flest járn á ólpa þá, er hann var í*).

Benjamin Blaney has already noted that the terms formed from the noun *hamr* refer primarily to male persons.⁽³⁷³⁾ However, the expression *skipta hómum* or the feminine noun *hamhleypa*⁽³⁷⁴⁾ can also refer to women, who are generally depicted as sorceresses (cf. the *seiðkona* who exchanges bodies with Signý in the *Völsunga saga*).⁽³⁷⁵⁾ With regard to the description of the *berserksgangr*, the vocabulary used and examined in this chapter (the verb *hamask*, the phrase *eigi einhamr*, the adjective *hamrammr*, etc.) essentially refers to frenetic fits of rage. Scenes in which animal transformations are described are only rarely part of the Old Norse berserker stories and are limited to the legendary tradition (*Fornaldarsögur*). In the *Íslendingasögur* and *Konungasögur*, there is again a clear difference between the berserkers and the humans who magical abilities. The latter can supposedly perform complete transformations, while the animal warriors reveal their "animal side" through the ecstatic violence that overcomes them. The imitation of the

370 Rafn (ed.) 1830: p. 256 f. for Jólgeir, p. 343 for Grímr ægir.

371 Jóhannes Halldórsson (ed.) 1959, p. 370 f.

372 Rafn (ed.) 1830, p. 322.

373 Blaney 1972, p. 45.

374 Cf. Strömbäck 1935, p. 162 f. Dillmann 2006, p. 260, note 89 translates the term as "celui qui laisse courir (*hleypa*) son *hamr*". He adds: "Ce terme féminin s'applique aussi bien à une femme qu'à un homme..... Dans le corpus proprement islandais, le composé *hamhleypa* ne se rencontre qu'une seule fois, sous sa forme parallèle *ham(h)laupa*, à propos d'une femme versée dans la magie, Kerling Styrkársdóttir (au chap. XIV de la *Þorskfirðinga saga*)." The term apparently does not necessarily apply to Berserker.

375 *Völsunga saga*, ch. VIII (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 128).

The behavior and appearance of wild animals (howling, wearing animal furs) naturally reinforces this impression.

In the case of the berserkers, the "changing of the exterior" is based on psychological factors that are linked to religious beliefs. In his study of transformation cults, Otto Höfler pointed out the close connection between ecstatic rituals and the custom of wearing masks in Aryan societies.³⁷⁶ The masked warrior identifies himself with a wild animal and thus continues a tradition that he has inherited from his ancestors - as suggested by the series of theriophore names within some genealogies in the Old Norse sources. Konrad Maurer has described this procedure as an "inner verification".³⁷⁷ The masked man is indeed by his companions and opponents as a wild beast. The "demonic" power of the berserker (in the sense of the Greek adjective δαιμόνιος, "inspired by divine power")³⁷⁸ triggers horror, but at the same time it also has a sacred character that marks the animal warrior's entry into an intermediate sphere between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The main elements of Óðinn mythology illustrate the place assigned to these ideas in Norse paganism.

The *berserksgangr* is obviously not brought about deliberately by a particular technique, but rather seems to be an inherited trait, as can be seen in the example of the family of the skald Egill.

During their attacks, the wild warriors "resemble" bears or wolves, whose "nature" they take on. However, in the eyes of their contemporaries, they are not capable of assuming the appearance of an animal *ad libitum* - an ability that only wizards and gods possess. The physical changes attributed to the berserkers in the *Fornaldarsögur* are above all evidence of a late literary tradition that took hold during the Christian Middle Ages.

Konrad Maurer³⁷⁹ regards the use of terms and expressions such as *hamrammr*, *hamask* or *eigi einhamr* in connection with the description of the purely psychological phenomenon of *berserksgangr* as a "weakening of the use of language", since these idioms "originally . . . were intended to indicate the capacity for a real change of form". This strictly chronological approach does make it possible to overcome some of the difficulties associated with the attempt to interpret the Old Norse terms. On the

376 Höfler 1973a; cf. in particular p. 43 f.

377 Maurer 1856, 2, p. 105.

378 Cf. Höfler 1934, p. IX: "In his famous conversation with Eckermann on March 2, 1831, Goethe described the demonic as 'that which cannot be dissolved by understanding and reason'."

379 Maurer 1856, p. 105; see also Blaney 1972, p. 63a.

However, a comparative study of the medieval sources reveals a more complex development, according to which the same words can have different meanings in different contexts. The aim of such an investigation is to filter out from all the stereotypes and more or less authentic evidence the ideas and customs that were associated with the *berserksgangr* in pre-Christian Norse society: the belief in the exclusive soul, the ability to increase battle rage (cf. lat. *bellandi furor*, Greek λύσσα) and its consequences (invulnerability, increased strength etc.), the cultic animal disguise in connection with the Óðinn mythology as well as the customs and rituals of the warrior elite organized by allegiance.

The last traces of this connection between animal symbolism and the customs and beliefs of the pre-Christian warrior elite can be observed in Norway until the first decades of the 11th century - the story of Þórir hundr, which has been handed down in various versions of the *Óláfs saga helga*, serves as evidence of this: This pagan leader is undoubtedly the last representative of the animal warrior tradition and played a significant role on the battlefields of the north.

Chapter VIII

Þórir hundr and the last animal warriors in 11th century Norway

In the surviving skaldic sources of the 9th century, the term *berserkir* refers to the members of an elite troop who served the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri. In the Old Icelandic sagas, the description of the berserkers again follows stereotypes that deviate strongly from these historical models, while other figures whose behavior is linked to the traditions of the animal warriors are strangely not referred to as *berserkir*. These are not only legendary heroes such as Bǫðvarr Bjarki,¹ but also whose historical existence cannot be doubted. These include Þórir hundr and his eleven companions, who occupy a unique position in Old Norse literature.

In an episode of the story of St. Óláfr, whose tradition is supported by skaldic stanzas, these warriors are assigned a decisive role during the Battle of Stiklastaðir, in which Norwegian peasants (*bóndi*, pl. *bændr*)² under the leadership of noblemen (*lendir menn*) defeated King Óláfr Haraldsson around 1030⁽³⁾.

Þórir hundr and his fur-clad followers, who in the front line of the peasant army against Óláfr, were probably the last animal warriors to appear on a battlefield more than a century and a half after the berserkers of Hafsrfjord. There is no later evidence in the sources of this custom, which was not to survive the Christianization of the north.

Þórir companions are the last representatives of an archaic form of companionship that is inextricably linked to pagan beliefs. This tradition goes back to old customs that were common to several Germanic peoples in the Migration Period and the Migration Age - such as the Lango-Bardic historiography (cf. the *cynocephali* in Paulus Diaconus, *Historia*

1 In Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 140), he is one of King Hrólfr krakís' berserkers, but is not described as such in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*. However, Old Norse tradition reports that he fought in the form of a bear during King Hrólfr's last battle (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 102 f.). In Saxo Grammaticus, Biarco does not undergo a transformation of this kind.

2 The army of opponents is described in the sources as *bóndaherr* (*Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 481), *bóndalið* (p. 509), *bóndasafnaðr* (or *bóndasamnaðr*, p. 456) or *bóndamúgr* (p. 471).

3 Cf. among others *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), pp. 474-486.

Langobardorum, I, 11)⁴ or the depiction of wolf warriors in Scandinavian and Alemannic iconography. The account of Þórir hundr and his companions demonstrates an astonishing continuity of this tradition into 11th-century Norway.

A Examination of the sources

hundr's fate is closely linked to that of his main adversary Óláfr Haraldsson, who can undoubtedly be described as "the most important of the Norwegian kings of the Viking Age and the Middle Ages"⁽⁵⁾.

Óláfr was born the son of a petty king of Grenland⁶ in the south-eastern part of Norway around 995.⁷ He set off on his first military campaigns at the age of twelve, initially heading for Sweden and Finland before defeating a number of "sea kings" along the Danish coast. From 1009, he took part in the conquest of England with a Danish Viking army. According to Old Norse tradition, Óláfr then entered the service of the Anglo-Saxon king Æthelred. In all probability, he was baptized in Rouen during a stay in Normandy around 1013.⁸ In 1015, Óláfr returned to Normandy.

4 See chapter VII above for the full quotation of this passage. Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana*, II, 106 confirms the fearsome ferocity of this people and describes them as *gens etiam germana feritate ferocior*. There is no doubt that the text provides evidence for the use of dog masks. This custom is probably associated with the protective symbol of a clan or tribe. Several researchers have also linked the old name of the Lombards - *Vinnili* - with the dialectal German *winnig* or *winnend*, which is usually used for a wild dog (cf. Weiser-Aall 1927, p. 49; Much 1924, p. 109 f.; Much 1925, p. 120). The name *Glomman* ("Beller"), also a Germanic tribe, is also reminiscent of a canid - undoubtedly the wolf (cf. an. *glammi*). Cf. on this question Much 1920; Scheibelreiter 1976, p. 34.

5 Cf. Krag 2003, p. 54.

6 An area between Agder and Vestfold.

7 However, this traditional dating, which links Óláfr's birth with Óláfr Tryggvason's assumption of kingship in Norway, is disputed: according to Krag (2003, p. 54), Óláfr may have been born a few years earlier.

8 This information, which is handed down by some Norwegian sources from the late 12th century such as the *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* by Archbishop Eysteinn (Metcalfe (ed.) 1881, p. 68) or the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus Monachus (p. 22), goes back to the *Gesta Normannorum ducum* (V, 11 f.) by Guillaume de Jumièges (van Houts (ed./trans.) 1992/1995; cf. also Marx (ed.) 1914). However, Theodoricus also mentions other versions of the story, according to which it is claimed that Óláfr Haraldsson was baptized as a child by King Óláfr Tryggvason in Norway or that he was baptized at a later date during a stay in England. Later sources such as Snorri's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (p. 373) also report a baptism by Óláfr Tryggvason in Norway. On this question, see Johnsen 1916, p. 20 f.; Musset 1997, p. 39; Dillmann 2000a, p. 561 f.; Mortensen 2000.

Óláfr returned to Norway to his claim to the throne. Although later medieval tradition legitimized Óláfr's reign through a relationship with Harald Fairhair, modern scholars this lineage.⁹ On Palm Sunday 1016, Óláfr defeated Ladejarl Sveinn in the naval battle of Nesjar. The young king, who established his royal seat in Niðaróss (Trondheim), quickly succeeded in asserting his rule over almost the entire country. Óláfr campaigned for the definitive Christianization of Norway, which was already advanced at the time, and together with the English-born bishop Grímkell laid the foundations for the country's later church constitution. In order to secure peace with his Swedish opponent, King Óláfr skötkonungr, Óláfr asked for the hand of his daughter Ingigerðr, whose half-sister Ástriðr he would eventually marry, while Ingigerðr married Prince Jaroslav of Kiev. From 1025, Knut the Great laid claim to the Norwegian kingship. In response, Óláfr plundered Zealand. Despite the support of the Swedish king Anund Jakob, his brother-in-law, Óláfr was defeated by Knútr, who had moved east with an Anglo-Danish fleet, at the River Helge in Skåne. At the same time, discontent grew in Norway against Óláfr, whose ruthless rule met with resistance from the powerful chieftains and peasants of the west coast. Erlingr Skjálgsson, the most powerful man in the Norwegian Westland at the time, and the Ladejarl Hákon Eiríksson were the main representatives of this opposition. Both were closely associated with Knútr. There was open conflict between Óláfr and Erlingr, who was slain by one of the king's henchmen. Erlingr's death was to have disastrous consequences for Óláfr, whose power began to wane inexorably. Knútr moved to Norway with a larger fleet and Óláfr fled to Novgorod to Prince Yaroslav, his brother-in-law. Knútr, who was celebrated as king in Norway, transferred rule to his nephew Hákon Jarl. An unexpected power vacuum arose in 1029 when Hákon lost at sea on his return voyage after a stay in England. Óláfr tried to take advantage of this change of situation to reconquer Norway. He moved via Sweden, where he gathered troops, to Trøndelag and met the opposing, numerically far superior peasant army in Stiklastaðir. Óláfr fell on the battlefield on July 29, 1030, slain by three opponents, Kálfr Árna-son, Þórir hundr and one of his companions named Þorsteinn knarrarsmiðr ("shipwright"). After his death, several miracles were reported that earned him the reputation of a saint, so that the cult of Olaf spread rapidly across Scandinavia to England and Novgorod. In addition, posthumous popularity, which was promoted by the clergy, must be linked to the dissatisfaction that arose among his former opponents towards the Danish

9 Cf. Krag 1989.

power was established. In the middle of the 12th century, the holy king was declared *rex perpetuus Norvegiae* by a letter of privilege from Magnús Erlingsson to the Norwegian church⁽¹⁰⁾.

The various, more or less related Old Norse prose works, which unanimously referred to in the academic literature as *Óláfs saga helga*, have a very complex textual history that combines several traditions: the skaldic poems,¹¹ the ecclesiastical texts¹² and finally the Latin or vernacular historiography¹³.

10 On Óláfr's life and the Battle of Stiklastaðir, Bukdahl 1930; Dickins 1937/ 1938; Moberg 1941; Brøgger 1946; Holtsmark 1956, pp. 15-24; Holmsen / Simensen 1967; Andersen 1977, pp. 109-143; Svahnström 1981; Blindheim 1981; Sandnes 1992; Astås 1993; Krag 1995, pp. 120-165; Krag 2003, p. 54 ff.

11 Cf. among others the *Glælognskviða* of Þórarinn loftunga (written after 1030), the *Vikingsarvísur* (c. 1014/1015), the *Nesjavísur* (c. 1016) and the *Erfridrápa* (c. 1040) of Sigvatr Þórðarson as well as the poem *Geisli* by Einarr Skúlason (c. 1152). On the Skaldic sources about Óláfr Haraldsson, see, among others, the summary by Whaley 2003, pp. 71-78.

12 Cf. inter alia the *Officium* preserved in an English manuscript of c. 1050 (*Leofric Collectar*), which attests to the early spread of the cult of Olav, but provides no information about the life of Óláfr; the now lost *Translatio sancti Olavi* mentioned by Theodoricus; the two versions of a now lost Latin legend, the older or shorter version of which survives under the title *Acta sancti Olavi regis et martyris* (Storm (ed.) 1880). The two versions of a now lost Latin legend, the older or shorter version of which survives under the title *Acta sancti Olavi regis et martyris* (Storm (ed.) 1880), while the younger, longer version (c. 1170) with the title *Passio et miracula beati Olavi* was attributed to Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendson (cf. the introduction by Phelpstead in Kunin (transl.) 2001); the vernacular translation of this legend in the Norwegian homily book (Indebrø (ed.) 1931, pp. 112-129). The early emergence of a hagiographic tradition around Óláfr is also documented by Adam von Bremen (II, 61). On the hagiographic Old Norse sources see, among others, Widding / Bekker-Nielsen / Shook 1963.

13 In addition to the various passages about Óláfr in the Latin and Old Norse historical sources that summarize the history of the Norwegian kings (see, among others, the *Historia Norvegiae*, the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus Monachus, the *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum*, the *Morkinskinna* and the *Fagrskinna*), from the 12th century an independent Old Norse "Olaf literature". The so-called "Oldest Saga" was written in an Icelandic monastery between 1190 and 1210. This text is now lost except for six short fragments from a 13th century manuscript (Oslo *NRA* 52). Gustav Storm (ed.) 1893 published these fragments together with two fragments of the Arnamagnæan collection (*AM* 325 IV α-β 4°), which, however, do not belong to the "older saga" (cf. Louis-Jensen 1970) (cf. also the appendix to the edition of the "legendary saga" by Keyser and Unger (ed.) 1849). The "Legendarische Saga", written shortly after the "Älteste Saga", still at the beginning of the 13th century - perhaps in Iceland - is preserved in a single Norwegian manuscript from around 1250 (*DG* 8). The last section of this text provides a catalog of the miracles attributed King Óláfr. Based on earlier sources, some of which are now lost, the Icelandic priest Styrmir Kárason wrote a *Lifssaga Óláfs hins helga* around 1220, the text of which only survived in individual chapters that were included in the *Flateyjarbók*. The existence of a so-called "middle saga", postulated by Sigurður Nordal in 1914 in his fundamental, critical study of the *Óláfs saga* as an intermediate stage between the Elder Saga and the Legendary Saga and Styrmir's *Lifssaga*, remains controversial. However, Snorri Sturluson was undoubtedly familiar with the work of his contemporary and friend Styrmir, which was probably one of the most written sagas in the world.

The complicated connection between these different sources cannot be discussed in detail within the framework of this study.⁽¹⁴⁾ Only two texts will be examined in which Þórir hundr is also mentioned: the version of *Óláfs saga hins helga*, which forms the middle section of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, and the so-called "Legendary Saga".

1 The report of the *Heimskringla*

In chapter CVI of his *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), Snorri Sturluson introduces the character of Þórir hundr¹⁵ during a journey of King Óláfr to Halogaland:

Þá bjó í Bjarkey Þórir hundr, hann var ríkastaðr maðr norðr; hann gerðisk þá lendr maðr Óláfs konungs.¹⁶

(There lived Þórir hundr on Bjarkey, he was the richest man there in the north; he became feudal lord to King Óláfr).

The king stayed in this northern region with the intention of imposing the Christian faith once and for all: *Óláfr konungr dvalðisk mestan hluta sumars á Hálogalandi ok fór í alar þinghár ok kristnaði þar allan lýð* ("King Óláfr stayed in Halogaland for most of the summer and went to all Thinge and missio- nized all the people there to Christianity"). Since King Óláfr Tryggvason had already carried out a similar mission in Halogaland a few years earlier (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Hkr), chap. LXXVII),¹⁷ it can be assumed the results of this apparently successful attempt at Christianization remained superficial and uncertain. Snorri mentions, however, that the pagan customs in the southern Trøndelag were still firmly rooted in the time of King Óláfr Haraldsson (cf. *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), chap. CVII f.): The population that

was the source for his own *Óláfs saga hins helga*. This was first written as an independent work around 1230, before Snorri included it in an abridged form as the centerpiece of his *Heimskringla* (the entire *Heimskringla* is usually attributed to Snorri, although some scholars think the work to be a posthumous compilation, cf. the literature cited in Whaley (ed.) 2012, p. clxix f.). The 'independent saga' has survived in a number of medieval manuscripts (including *Holm perg 2 4°*; cf. the edition by Johnsen and Jón Helgason (eds.) 1941). In some collected manuscripts (including the *Flateyjarbók*), the text is expanded by interpolations from other sources that were not used by Snorri. On the Old Norse prose sources about the saint Óláfr, see Wolf 2013, pp. 284-300.

14 A considerable amount of literature has been published on this complex question. For a brief overview of the most important sources of Olaf's history, the articles by Sverrir Tómasson 2003 and Simek / Herrmann Pálsson 2007, p. 290 ff.

15 On Þórir hundr see, among others, Fidjestøl 1987.

16 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, p. 218.

17 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1893-1900, p. 395 f.

organized large libations according to ancient custom, even claimed that the conversion of Halogaland had angered the gods⁽¹⁸⁾.

After Þórir hundr, who comes from a local aristocratic family, is said to have sworn fealty (*lendr maðr*) to Óláfr, he quickly turns his back on him because he does not like the king's missionary zeal and ambition.

brother, Sigurðr, is described as "a very rich man, of great renown" (*maðr stórauðigr, virðinga-maðr mikill*), who had married the sister of Erlingr Skjálgsson. After his conversion, he is said to have continued to organize the sumptuous feasts that he used to give three times a year as a heathen, namely *at the beginning of winter, around midwinter and in summer: at vetrnóttum, at miðjum vetri, at sumri*.¹⁹ His son Ásbjörn, who comes into conflict with Óláfr, is encouraged by Þórir to oppose the king. This advice proves disastrous, as Ásbjörn is soon afterwards slain by one of Óláfr's henchmen. Ásbjörn's mother demands revenge and hands Þórir the spear with which his son was killed: He should not put down this weapon until he thrust it into Óláfrchest.

Soon afterwards, Þórir uses this spear to kill a henchman of the king, who had been an accomplice in the murder of Ásbjörn, under the pretext of an unjust distribution of the spoils after a raid in Bjarmaland²⁰ (ch. CXXXIII).²¹ After his refusal to pay Óláfr's representative the full fine demanded by him for this deed, Þórir joins King Knútr in England (ch. CXXXIX).²² When the latter invades Norway, Þórir accompanies his Danish protector, whose liege he becomes, while Óláfr flees to a foreign land (ch. CLXX).²³

Knútr grants his *lendir menn* Þórir hundr and Hárekr ór Þjóttu the privilege of "Finn voyage", trade with the *Finnar* (*Knútr konungr [. . .] fekk þeim Finnferð*). For two years, Þórir maintains close economic ties with the Sami people, who live in the northern regions of the Scandinavian peninsula.

18 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, pp. 219: *váru þar drykkjur miklar; var konungi svá sagt, at þar væri minni ǫll signuð Ásum at fornum sið; þat fylgði ok þeiri sǫgn, at þar væri drepit naut ok hross ok roðnir stallar af blóði ok framit blót ok veittr sá formáli, at þat skyldi vera til árbótar; þat fylgði, at ǫllum mǫnnum þótti þat auðsýnt, at goðin hefðu reizk, er Háleygir hefðu horfit til kristni.* ("There was much drinking there; the king was told that all the cups were consecrated to the Aesir according to the old custom; then it was reported that cattle and horses were slaughtered there and the idols were reddened with blood, and these sacrifices were offered for the purpose of helping a better harvest; then it was said that it seemed clear to all men that the gods were angry because the people of Halogaland had turned to Christ.")

19 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, p. 242.

20 Bjarmaland, or "the land of the Bjarmars", is located in the north of present-day Russia, at the mouth of the northern Dvina River on the shores of the White Sea.

21 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, pp. 290-299.

22 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, pp. 320-326.

23 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1895-1898, p. 394 f.

is. Although the northernmost province of Norway still bears the name Finnmark today, in the Middle Ages this name could also refer to parts of the country south of it⁽²⁴⁾ so that Halogaland, Þórir hundr's area of origin, corresponded to a part of what was then Finnmark. However, the Legendary Saga mentions that Þórir fled to Finnmark. Óláfr declared him peaceless, before returning to Norway two years later²⁵ - which could indicate a clear distinction between the royal domain and the northern part of Finnmark. The knowledge and supernatural abilities attributed the Sami magicians are frequent themes in Old Norse literature.²⁶ During his stay among the Finns, twelve shirts are for Þórir from reindeer hide, to which Snorri attributes magical abilities:

Hann lét þar gera sér xii. hreinbjálba²⁷ með svá mikilli fjölkyngi, at ekki vápn festi á ok síðr miklu en á hringa-brynju.²⁸

(He had twelve reindeer-skin vests made for himself, which had so much magic power that no weapon could penetrate them - much less a ring-brown).

24 Cf. Dillmann 2000a, p. 465, note 4. In old Norway, Finnmark (cf. also the plural form Finnmerkr) extended as far as Namdal in Norway and Jämtland in Sweden. In this case, Finnmark also included Halogaland.

25 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 152.

26 The figure of the Sami sorcerer (often referred to as *fjölknungr*) appears repeatedly in Old Norse literature, including in the *Konungasögur*. In chapter XXXII of *Harald's saga hárfagra* (pp. 144-147), two Sami magicians impart magical knowledge to the future queen Gunnhildr; in chapter IX of Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr) (pp. 12 f.), the Finns unleash a storm on army, etc. (for further references, see above all Strömbäck 1935, pp. 198-206; Dillmann 2006, pp. 384 f.). Latin-language Scandinavian historiography confirms the importance of this tradition. Particular reference is to the *Historia Norwegiae* (Storm (ed.) 1880, p. 82 f.) and the *Gesta Danorum*. Saxo Grammaticus describes the magical abilities of the Finns (V, xiii, 1: *Finni [. . .]. Incantationum studiss incumbunt*) as well as the use of weather magic on the battlefield by the Bjarmar (1, viii, 16: These *Byarmenses* are the *Bjarmar* from Old Norse literature, the inhabitants of Bjarmaland). Dillmann 2006, p. 389, note 83 emphasizes that the term *Finnar*, apart from its ethnographic meaning, should not be used as a simple synonym for "Magier" (cf. also Strömbäck 1935, pp. 203-205; against this Koht 1923). For an overview of this question, see Fritzner 1877; Lindow 1995; Mundal 1996; Hultkrantz 2001.

27 The etymology of the noun *bjálfi* (or *bjálbi*) is uncertain. It is possibly of Slavic origin (cf. *IED*, p. 65). In Old Norse, this term denotes either a "fur coat" or a "fur shirt" and occurs both as a *simplex* and as part of composites (*hrein-bjálbi*, *geit-bjálbi* etc.). It is also used as a masculine first name, which was used by Kveld-Úlfr's father, the grandfather of the Skald Egill and a famous berserker (see chapter V above). In Faroese, *bjálfi* refers to the "seal skin" that covers the souls of the dead (cf. de Vries 1962, who derives the term from the Russian *běljók*, "young seal", from *běl*, "white").

28 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), ch. CXIII, p. 440 f.

No blade can penetrate these furs, which will soon demonstrate their extraordinary ability.

learning of Óláfr's return to Norway, hundr launches a *leiðangr*²⁹ and the allied forces against the king at the head of his *bændr*. Eleven *húskarlar*,³⁰ chosen with great care, surround Þórir on the day of battle.³¹ Certainly these *húskarlar* (literally: householders, servants) cannot be compared with the noble members of a royal retinue: in all likelihood they are simple peasant servants - yet free people who are characterized by their loyalty and boldness, so that they rally around their leader as comrades-in-arms in a group organized as a retinue. These followers Þórir naturally take their place at the head of the battle order:

Þórir hundr með sína sveit var í ǫndurðu brjósti fylkingar fyrir merkjum; þar var ok valit lið af bóndum á tvær hliðar Þóri, þat sem snarpast var ok bazt vápnat.³²

(Þórir hundr and his entourage were in the forefront of the battle in front of the banner; there on either side of Þórir was a select band of peasants who were the boldest and best armed).

The honor of giving the signal to begin the battle falls to Þórir and his companions:

Þórir hundr kom þá ok gekk fram með sveit sína fyrir merkit ok kallaði: "fram, fram, bóandmenn". Lustu þá upp herópi ok skutu bæði rum ok spjótum.³³

(Then Þórir hundr came and walked with his entourage in front of the banner and shouted: "Forward, forward, peasants". They shouted the war cry and shot arrows and threw spears).

In the midst of the battle, King Óláfr personally encounters his old enemy, but the ruler's sword cannot penetrate Þórir's shoulder as he is protected by his enchanted fur shirt. Snorri provides a detailed description of this episode, relying mainly on Skaldenstro-

29 It is a system of territorial mobilization that allows a fleet of ships to be set up in the shortest possible time. This system also soon acquired a fiscal aspect. the many publications on this subject, see Musset 1997, p. 89 f.; Kuhn 1991; Strauch 2001.

30 On the use of this term, which is also well documented in the Anglo-Saxon world, see Lindow 1976, p. 113 f., among others.

31 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), chap. CCXIX, p. 479 f.: *Nú er þat frá mér at segja, at ek hef valit til af hús- kǫrlum mínum menn xi..., þá er snarpastir eru, ok ætla ek, at vér skylim ekki við aðra meta at skipta hǫggum við Óláf, ef vér komumk í færi um þat.* ("Now I can report that I have chosen eleven of my household who are the bravest, and I believe this, that we need not leave it to others to exchange blows with Ólafr when we get the chance.").

32 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), chap. CCXXI, p. 482.

33 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), chap. CCXXVI, p. 486 f.

phen attributed to the skald Sigvatr,³⁴ a contemporary and friend :³⁵

Óláfr konungr hjó til Þóris hundz um herðarnar; sverðit beit ekki, en svá sýndisk sem dust
ryki ór hreinbjálbanum; þessa getr Sigvatr:

Mildr fann gǫrst, hvé galdrar,
gramr sjalfr, meginrammir
fjǫlkunnigra Finna
fullstórum barg Þóri,
þás hyrsendir Hundi
húna golli búnu slætt
réðsízt at bíta sverði
laust of herðar.³⁶

Þórir hjó til konungs, ok skiptusk þeir þá nokkurum hoggum við, ok beit ekki sverð konungs,
þar er hreinbjálbin var fyrir, en þó varð Þórir sárr á hendi; enn kvað Sigvatr:

Þollr dylr saðrar snilli
seims, en þat veitk heiman,
hverr sæi Hunds verk
stoerri hugstórs, es frýr, es
þvergarða þorði, hinn es
fram of sótti, Glyggs í gogn
at hoggva gunnranns
konungmanni.³⁷

34 Cf. on this skald: Finnur Jónsson 1901; Paasche 1917, pp. 57-86; Hollander 1940; Lie 1970; Poole 1993; Poole 2005.

35 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), chap. CCXXVIII, p. 492 f.

36 This is the 16th verse of the *Erfidrápa* of Sigvatr. The noun neuter *erfi* refers to the funeral meal. As a generic term in Old Norse poetry, the name *Erfidrápa* refers to songs of praise to a deceased prince. Sigvatr wrote *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* in his later years, around 1040 (cf. the legendary tale about the creation of the poem in *Óláfs saga helga* (Flat), p. 394). The skald, who on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1030, did not take part in the Battle of Stiklastaðir himself. For the 16th stanza, see the commentary by Judith Jesch (ed./trans.) 2012, p. 683, in which the sequence of words put together as follows: *Mildr gramr fann gǫrst sjalfr, hvé meginram- mir galdrar fjǫlkunnigra Finna barg fullstórum, þás húna hyrsendir laust sverði búnu golli of herðar Hundi; slætt réð sízt at bíta*. The expression *húna hyrr*, "the fire of the masthead", is a metaphor for gold. The phrase *húna hyrsendir*, "he who spreads the fire of the masthead",

"the one who distributes the gold", i.e. "the bountiful one", refers here to the king.

37 17th verse of the *Erfidrápa*. Judith Jesch (ed./trans.) 2012, p. 683 reconstructs the order of the words as follows: *þollr seims, es frýr Þóri, dylr saðrar snilli, en veitk þat heiman - hver sæi stoerri verk hugstórs Hunds? -, es Þrótr þvergarða glyggs gunnranns, hinns of sótti framm, þorði at hoggva í gogn konungmanni*. The nominal group of the genitive *dog hugstórs* ("of the brave dog") can refer to both *snilli* ("courage") and *verk* ("action", here "great deed"). The expression *þollr seims* ("jaws of gold") refers to a "man", just as the poetic paraphrase (*kenning*) *Þrótr gunnranns glyggs þvergarða* to a "warrior". The femi-

Konungr mælti til Bjarnar stallara: "Ber þú hundinn, er eigi bíta járn." Björn snøri ǫxinni í hendi sér ok laust með hamrinum; kom þat hogg á ǫxl Þóri, ok varð allmikit hogg, ok rataði Þórir við [. . .]. Þá lagði Þórir hundr spjóti til Bjarnar stallara á honum miðjum, veitti honum bana-sár. Þá mælti Þórir: "Svá bautu vér björnuna".

(King Ólafr struck Þórir hundr on the shoulders; the sword did not bite and it seemed as if dust was coming out of the reindeer hide; this is what Sigvatr says:

The gracious prince himself experienced most
clearly how the very powerful spells
of the troll-like Finns
rescued the foolhardy Þórir
when the freeborn (= Ólafr)
with the gold-decorated sword on
the dog's shoulders.
The blunt scabbard could bite the least.

Þórir struck the king, and they gave each other a few blows, and the king's sword did not bite, because the reindeer skin prevented it, and yet Þórir was wounded in the hand; and so Sigvatr spoke:

The man
who despises Thorir denies
true bravery, I know that
from back home,
- Who could have seen a bolder act of the bold dog? - than the
warrior,
who stormed forward
dared to strike the king⁽³⁸⁾.

The king said to Björn stallari: "Strike the dog that no iron can bite." Björn turned the axe over in his hand and struck with the back of the axe; this blow struck armpit, and it was a mighty blow, and Þórir stumbled [. . .]. Then Þórir thrust his spear into Björn stallari's belly and gave him a mortal wound. Thensaid: "This is how we kill bears.")

During the duel, King Ólafr succumbs to the blows of Þórir and his companions.

nine noun *gunnr* ("battle") in the compound *gunnrann* ("house, hall of battle", meaning the "shield") also recalls the name of a Valkyrie (a similar ambiguity is also found in stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði*); *gunnranns glyggs* ("storm of shields") thus means "battle"; *gunnranns glyggs þvergarðr* ("rampart of war") also corresponds to a *kenning* for "shield"; *Þrótt*, "strength", "power", is an; the "Þrótt of the shield" is the "Fighter, warrior".

38 Translation of the verse after Hube 2006, p. 443. On the role of Þórir in King Olaf's fall, see Dillmann 2019.

Following the description of the battle, there is an episode that corresponds to the uplifting character of the hagiographic legend: when Þórir pays his last respects to the fallen Óláfr and places a cloth on the corpse, his wounded hand comes into contact with the king's blood. The wound then heals quickly. According to Snorri, Þórir was the very first of the leaders of the peasant army to proclaim the holiness of his former opponent.

The *Heimskringla* account of Þórir's participation in the Battle of Stiklastaðir is not isolated. Other sources partly confirm the account of these events, but also provide variants. This is particularly the case in the *Legendary Saga*³⁹, which is preserved in a Norwegian manuscript from the 13th century (*DG 8*, preserved in Uppsala).⁴⁰

2 The *Legendary Saga* report

This only surviving version of the *Legendary Saga*, which originates from Trøndelag,⁴¹ can be identified as a copy of a now lost original, probably written in Iceland around 1200. It is not unlikely that the author of the Norwegian version enriched the original text, whose material was taken from both skaldic verses and various written, profane and ecclesiastical sources, with information gained from local oral traditions, especially in connection with the death, as Stiklastaðir is in this region. The details that distinguish the *Legendary Saga* from Snorri's work, as well as the similarities between the two texts, therefore deserve careful examination.

39 The term "legendary saga" was introduced by Peter A. Munch in 1853 to distinguish this work from the historically oriented *Óláfs saga Snorris* (cf. Munch / Unger (ed.) 1853, p. IV).

40 We owe the first edition of this text to Rudolph Keyser and Carl Richard Unger (1849). A diplomatic edition was published by Oskar A. Johnsen in 1922. Anne Holtsmark a facsimile edition in 1956. A normalized Icelandic edition by Guði Jónsson (1957) exists. The present work uses the edition and translation by Anne Heinrichs et al. (1982).

41 It was written in a "purely Trøndish language form" (Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, p. 20; Marius Hægstad, "Um maalet i Ólafs saga hins helga", in Johnsen (ed.) 1922, pp. XXVIII-LVII). On the palaeographical peculiarities that allow a dating, see, among others, Seip 1954, pp. 65 f.; on the history of the manuscript, see the above-cited edition by Johnsen (ed.) 1922, pp. XI f. and the *Legendarische Óláfs saga helga* (Holtsmark (ed.) 1956), pp. 1 f.

Just as in *the Heimskringla*, Þórir (Þorer hundr) is portrayed in the Legendary Saga as one of the important personalities who, together with Erlingr Skjálgsson, oppose King Olaf:

Nu stirðnaðu rikismenn við konongenn. Var mest at þui Ærlingr Skialgsson, er þa var mestr maðr i Norege oc rikaztr allra lænnðra manna. Þorer hundr var oc rikr maðr [. . .]. For siðan or lande oc marger lænder aðrer oc gerðozc otruir kononge af raðom sinum oc ihuga.⁴²

(The powerful were stiff-necked towards the king, especially Erling, Skjal's son, who very important in Norway at the time and the most powerful of the feudatories. Thorir Hund was also a powerful man [. . .]. He and many other feudatories left the country and were disloyal to the king in their plans and thoughts)⁽⁴³⁾.

In contrast to the *Heimskringla* account, however, the Legendary Saga mentions that Þórir is said to have been banished for the murder of three of the king's men. For this reason, he flees to Finnmark, where he spends two years. After his return to Norway, he remains a declared enemy of the Norwegian king and relies on sorcery in his endeavors:

Træystizc miokc fiolcyngi Finna i mote Olave kononge oc gecc þa æinna manna mest at þui, at vera mote Olave kononge.⁴⁴

(In his opposition to King Óláfr, he went the furthest of all men, relying heavily on the wizardry of the Finns.)⁴⁵

It is also claimed that Þórir and other feudatories accepted money from King Knútr to conspire against Óláfr.⁽⁴⁶⁾

In describing the Battle of Stiklastaðir, the Legendary Saga confirms that Þórir and his eleven companions form a cohesive group that stands out from the main body of the peasant army:

Þorer hundr oc þæir xij. saman ero firir utan fylcingarnar oc lausir [. . .].⁴⁷

(Outside the battle lines were Thorir Hund and his eleven men, who were not integrated anywhere [. . .].)⁴⁸

In the Norwegian text, however, there is an element that contradicts Snorri Sturluson's account: *[. . .] oc varo i vargskinzstakcum* ("[. . .] they wore jackets made of wolf fur"). In this case, Þórir's companions are not dressed in reindeer skins, but in coats made of wolf fur.

42 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 108.

43 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 109.

44 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 152.

45 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 153.

46 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 158.

47 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 192.

48 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 193.

The term *vargstakkr* (abbreviated form of *vargskinnstakkr*)⁴⁹ describes the clothing of King Haraldr's berserkers in the *Vatnsdæla saga*: [. . .] *þeir berserkir, er úlfhéðnar váru kallaðir; þeir höfðu vargstakka fyrir brynjur ok vörðu framstafn á konungs skipinu* [. . .].⁵⁰

However, the *sagnamenn* never mention the term *berserksgangr* in connection with the opponents of Saint. The group of Þórir hundr nevertheless surprising similarities to the elite warriors of King Haraldr hárfagrís. The description of the last battle, which is recorded in the manuscript of the *Legendary Saga*, suggests that Þórir and his men are animal warriors:

Sva sœgia menn, at Biorn digri hio með sværði til Þores hunnz um dagenn. En þar sem a kom, bæit ægi, hælldr en vænni bærði um. En Þorer oc þær .xij. saman varo i vargskinzstacum, þeim er Finnar hafðu gort þeim með mikilli fiolkyngi. Þa er Biorn sa, at sværdet bæit ægi, kallaðe hann a konongenn oc mællte: "Ægi bita vopnen hundana." "Bæri þer þa hundana," said konongrenn. Þa tok Biorn ser klubbu mikla oc laust Þore hund, sva at fell við, oc æ siðan bar hann hallt hauuð iamnan. Oc þa liop hann upp oc lagðe Biorn með spiote oc mællte:

"Sva bæitum ver biarnuna a morkenne norðr", sagðe hann.⁵¹

(People say that Björn the Fat struck at Thorir's dog with his sword that day. It didn't hurt him where it hit, but it was as if he was him with a rod. Thorir and his eleven companions had jackets of wolfskin that Finns had made for them with great wizardry. When Björn saw that the sword did not cut, he called out to the king: "The weapons do not bite the dogs!" "Then kill the dogs," said the king. Then Björn took a large club and struck Thorir's dog so hard that he fell down, and since then he has always held his head askew. Then Thorir jumped up and pierced Björn with his spear and said, "This is how we kill the bears in the north in Finnmarken!"⁵²

The dialog of this episode is similar to the version handed down by Snorri, with the exception of Sigvatr's stanzas, which are omitted here. In addition, the word "dog" appears in this text in the plural (in the definite form *hundana*), while in the *Heimskringla* it used in the singular (*hundinn*).⁵³

49 The masculine *stakkr* denotes a wide and sleeveless garment, often made of fur (to which the compound *skinnstakkr* already refers; cf. Falk 1919, p. 162 f.). The Old Norse word *vargr* refers to the wolf and a negative connotation. Since

"warg" terms (as. *uuarg*, ahd. *uuarc*, ae. *wearg*, an. *vargr*) originally corresponded to "one of the possible names for a criminal" in the Germanic area, it can be assumed that the animal meaning is only secondary, cf. Jacoby 1974.

50 Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24 g.; see above chap. IV.

51 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 194 ff.

52 Heinrichs et al. (eds./trans.) 1982, p. 195 f. To mock Björn, who is here equated with a hunted animal, Þórir naturally uses the appellative *björn* ("bear").

53 In the long version of *Óláfs saga helga*, which is recorded in the *Flateyjarbók*, Þórir hundr speaks the following words as he stabs his lance into Björn's body: *skulu ver bauta biornnuna ef þer berit hundana* (p. 356).

In the Legendary Saga, the noun *hundr* is thus used for all twelve warriors, whereas in Snorri it refers only to Þórir.⁵⁴ This is a significant detail: the epithet 'dog' is used in the Norwegian text as an attribute referring to the group of twelve companions. These *hundar*, who are clothed in animal skins, must be seen as a parallel to the *úlfheðnar* of Hafrsfjord.

As far as the final moments of the Battle of Stiklastaðir are concerned, the Legendary Saga's account that of the *Heimskringla* except for minor details. The "Hound" himself strikes the fatal blow against the king, but recognizes holiness shortly after this act. Some time later, he undertakes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, from which he does not return.⁵⁵

Other sources also report on the role of the 'dog' during the events under Óláfr's rule. These include, for example, the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* by Theodoricus monachus⁵⁶ or the interpolated version of *saga helga* handed down in the *Flateyjarbók*.⁵⁷ Compared to the texts of the *Heimskringla* or the Legendary Saga, however, these works contribute little new information about the behavior of Þórir and his companions (apart from the episode with the sorcerer Mǫttull in the *Flateyjarbók*).⁵⁸

B The figure of the beast warrior and the *interpretatio christiana*

The figure of the 'dog' surrounded by his retinue (Þórir *hundr með sína sveit*) clearly illustrates the role of animal warriors in Old Norse society. Furthermore, the historiographical tradition of the Óláfs *saga* testifies to the astonishing persistence of this archaic form of allegiance in the northern regions of Norway, where the influence of Christianity only became widespread relatively "late" (at the beginning of the 11th century).

The *húskarlar* Þóris undeniably the essential characteristics of beast warriors: they stand alongside their leader in the most exposed position on the battlefield; like the berserkers of King Haraldr hárfagri, they carry

⁵⁴ Cf. Höfler 1940, p. 114 f., note 62.

⁵⁵ Snorri also mentions this in chapter XI of the *Hákonar saga góða* (p. 23).

⁵⁶ Storm, Gustav (ed.) 1880, p. 41.

⁵⁷ Guðbrandr Vigfússon / Unger (ed.) 1862, p. 356 f. Cf. also *Viðbætur við Óláfs sögu hins helga* (p. 237 f.) and the poem *Óláfsríma Haraldssonar* in the *Flateyjarbók*, written around 1390 by Einar Gilsson.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Viðbætur við Óláfs sögu hins helga* (p. 244 f.). The text provides a very detailed description of Þóirstay with the Sami. In this version, the twelve reindeer skins (*hreini- bialfar*) were given to the "dog" by a king of Finnmark named Mǫttull, a follower of the pagan sacrificial rites (*heidinn blótmaðr*) and a great sorcerer (*miðk fiðlkynnigr*) (see also Johnsen / Jón Helgason (eds.) 1941, 2, p. 692).

"Wolfskins" (at least according to the *Legendary Saga*). In the sources, however, Þórir and his companions are never to as *úlfheðnar*. Nor is the term *berserksgangr* used in this historical context. How can the absence of this terminology be explained?

In his account of the Battle of Stiklastaðir, Snorri Sturluson draws primarily on the material handed down from the skaldic verses, which the *Erfidrápa*. In this poem, written around 1040 by Sigvatr Þórðarsson, the invulnerability Þórir hundr is attributed to the magical abilities of the Sami. However, the use of fur clothing - neither reindeer skins nor wolf pelts - is not explicitly mentioned. Nor does Sigvatr mention the elite troop that gathers around the "dog".

Snorri is mainly inspired by Sigvatr's tradition, to which he adds several elements that he has undoubtedly taken from other sources, such as the motif of the reindeer skins and the eleven *húskarlar* chosen by Þórir hundr. However, he no explicit connection between the warriors and the twelve *hreinbjálfar*: although the 'dog' wears one of the reindeer skins he received from the *Finnar* on the day of the battle, the text does not describe the clothing of his companions. The latter hardly play a role for Snorri: he mentions them briefly in his description of the army of the *bændr*,⁵⁹ without integrating them into the further course of the battle. This does not escape Otto Höfler: "The omission of the band of twelve is all the more striking as Snorri had previously . . . had told of twelve Fellwarmers (like his sources), which now becomes a blind motif!"⁶⁰

In this respect, the *Legendary Saga* - The first stanzas in which Þórir appears are not quoted - is a more coherent account of the events. It describes in detail the equipment worn by the 'dog' and his companions (ch. LXXIX): Þorer oc þæir .xij. saman varo i vargskinzsta- cum.⁶¹ Other elements are again consistent with the *Heimskringla* tradition, such as the motif of Sami magic as well as the episode of stay in Finnmark, which are also transmitted in the *Heimskringla*.

The various redactions of the story of St. Óláfr thus agree with the tradition of the *Erfidrápa*, since they unanimously recognize the role of the "Finnish" magicians as Þórir's helpers. It is possible that this is based in part on an authentic tradition.

Since the fur trade was of great importance to both the Scandinavians and the Sami, there is no reason to ignore the accounts of Þórir's journey.

59 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), ch. CCXIX, p. 479 f.; ch. CCXXVI, p. 486.

60 Höfler 1940, p. 115, note 62.

61 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 192, 194 ff.

to the north. This activity resulted in considerable revenue granted by King Knútr to his feudatories (cf. the *finnferð* mentioned by Snorri). According to the Legendary Saga, Þórir, who was banished by the king, even finds a place of refuge in Finnmark (ch. LXII).⁶²

For Óláfr's followers, however, Þórir's stay with the "Finns" primarily means the encounter between an indomitable opponent of the missionary king and a population versed in the art of magic (*ffolkynngi*).

Beyond the Old Icelandic sagas, the belief in a special talent of the *Finnar* in the field of magic corresponds to a popular, deeply rooted idea. In medieval Norway, Christian laws condemned superstition and the practice of magic with clear statements: *trúa á Finna eða fordæður* ("to believe in Finns or witches")⁶³ or *fara á Finnmerkr at spyrja spá* ("to go to Finnmark to receive a prophecy"),⁶⁴ cf. also the German expression *zum Blocksberg gehen*.⁶⁵

The reference to *meginrammir galdrar ffolkunnigra Finna* ("very magical, magic-practicing, knowledgeable Finns") in the work of the skald Sigvatr is not surprising,⁶⁶ as this formulation is closely related to an *interpretatio christiana*. The apologetic intention is clear. In order to praise *the exemplum* of the Christian king, the author of the *Erfidrápa* emphasizes the evilness of the enemy's activities: the courage of the ruler is contrasted with the magical abilities of the Sami. The use of enchanted furs the only effective antidote Óláfrbravery. However, Sigvatr does not fail to acknowledge Þórirheroic virtues.⁶⁷ But the "dog's" own fighting strength is hardly enough to secure him victory; the *Finnar*'s protective spells alone provide him with the decisive superiority. The motif of Sami magic contributes above all to discrediting Þórir through its connection to the pagan customs associated with sorcery in Christian discourse.

62 Heinrichs et al. (ed./trans.) 1982, p. 152.

63 *Eiðsifapingslög - Kristinn réttir hinn forni*, § 45 (Keyser / Unger (eds.) 1846, p. 389): *Engi maðr a at trúa. a finna. eða fordæður* (cf. also redaction B, § 34, p. 403).

64 *Borgarþingslög - Kristinn réttir hinn forni*, § 16 (Keyser / Unger (eds.) 1846, p. 350 f.): *þæt er ubota værk at gera finfarar. fara at spyrja spá*. Dillmann 2006, p. 30, note 6 translates this passage as follows: "c'est un crime majeur [literally: qui ne peut être expié par le versement d'une somme d'argent] que d'accomplir des voyages chez les Lapons, que d'aller recueillir une prediction." He also quotes the explicit formulation preserved in version B (*NKS 1642 4to*): *at fara a finmork oc spyrja spá*.

65 Cf. *IED*, p. 154.

66 Cf. Str. XVI of the *Erfidrápa*.

67 Cf. Str. XVII of the *Erfidrápa*.

However, this account of the events, which is characterized by a hagiographic perspective, does not take into account the beliefs of the opponents of the holy Óláfr and does not provide a credible explanation for the behaviour of Þórir's companions on the battlefield. Surely there was a cause other than Sami magic 'reputation for invulnerability in the eyes of his followers. Rather, the phenomenon can be interpreted by reference to the tradition of the animal warriors. Þórir's apparent insensitivity to sword blows – an ability attributed to berserkers in most medieval sources. This form of painlessness, caused by the frenzy that overcomes the beast warriors during battle, is one of the main characteristics of the *berserksgangr*.

The analogies between the 'dog' and the animal warriors of pre-Christian Nordic society are numerous. Þórir belongs to the social elite of *Halo-galand*. The berserkers, who were highly respected in the aristocratic milieu of the Viking Age,⁶⁸ also included several members of important families in their ranks.⁶⁹ These warriors, who often formed a core troop of twelve fighters,⁽⁷⁰⁾ occupied a place of honor in the ruler's entourage. In battle, they were given the task of protecting their leader; they stood in the most exposed position⁷¹ and formed a kind of shock troop.⁽⁷²⁾ Their unique appearance distinguished them from the rest of the army: they raged like wild animals and were clad in wolf pelts.⁷³ When they were attacked by the *furor*, they were unmoved by the bite of iron and fire and spread fear among their opponents.

This martial custom, which was probably linked to pagan rites and myths, disappeared when Christianity finally prevailed among the Scandinavian elites. Þórir and his eleven companions, standing at the forefront of battle in their wolf or reindeer skins, are the last representatives of this archaic tradition in medieval Norway. Although Þórir probably already became a Christian before the battle in Stiklastaðir, as his acceptance as Óláfr's liegeman proves, he comes from a newly converted family whose members had not yet renounced many pagan customs. Óláfr and his most loyal followers would not have approved of such an attitude. In this

68 Cf. stanzas 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði*.

69 Cf. among others the animal warriors Kveld-Úlfr and Berðlu-Kári in the *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*.

70 Cf. the sources that Boberg included in her list: Boberg 1966, p. 124, motif F610.3.300: Twelve berserks.

71 Cf. the various accounts of the Battle of Hafrsfjord, which state that the berserkers stood at the bow of the ship: *Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. IX, p. 107 f.; *Egils saga*, ch. IX (Sigurður Nordal (ed.) 1933, p. 22); *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. IX (Einar Sveinsson (ed.) 1939, p. 24 f.).

72 *Grettis saga*, ch. II (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936, p. 5).

73 *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Grettis saga* (see the references cited in Chapter IV above).

In this context, the fur coats of Þórir's followers are depicted as the product of Sa- mian sorcery.

This episode illustrates the merciless nature of the battle waged by the holy Óláfr against the last forces of paganism.⁷⁴Dillmann⁷⁵already noted that "l'opposition entre la *hamingja* (chance) du roi chrétien et la *ffolkynngi* (magic) des *Finnar* demeurés païens" is a frequently used motif in the kings' sagas (cf. in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga*, for example, the depiction of one of the first military campaigns undertaken by the future king of Norway).⁷⁶On the battlefield of Stiklastaðir, the king finally achieves a posthumous victory: his death leads to the final conversion of Þórir, who is miraculously healed of his wounds after touching Óláfr's corpse.

Although the reference to the *Finnar's* sorcery plays an important role in the revealing accounts of Óláfr's death, this narrative scheme, which overlooks the connection with the tradition of the beast warriors, obscures the true nature of the warrior group that gathers around Þórir hundr.

Apart from the motif of Sami magic, there are also other reasons why Þórir and his companions could not be called berserkers in the various versions of the Olaf story. On the one hand, not all angry, fur-clad warriors are explicitly listed in the Old Norse sources under the name *berserkir*; on the other hand, the sub- tantive *berserkr* in the corpus of the Old Icelandic sagas refers to various figures who often have no historical background. In the 150 years that separate the *Haraldskvæði* from the *Erfidrápa*, the use of the word evolved simultaneously with the social and religious changes in the Old Norse world.⁷⁷The term *berserkr* evokes quite different associations in 11th-century Norway than it did during the pre-Christian period. Consequently, the skald Sigvatr, a contemporary of St., could not have the idea of comparing the companions of Þórir hundr with the berserkers of King Haraldr hárfagris. To prove this, it is useful to analyze the different meanings of the word *berserkr*

74 Even though many pagans joined the king before the battle at Stiklastaðir (cf. among others Gauka-Þórir and Afra-Fasti, who are described by Snorri as *stigamenn ok inir mestu ránsmenn*, but by the author of the Legendary Saga as *kappar miklir oc [. . .] nalega berserkir*), Óláfr is said to have rejected all those who did not want to be baptized (cf. *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 452 f.).

75 Dillmann 2006, p. 384, note 70.

76 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 12 f.

77 See section VI above.

taking into account the respective type of source and etymology in a diachronic perspective⁽⁷⁸⁾.

The noun *berserkr*, which found exclusively in Old Norse literature, never in runic inscriptions. The word apparently refers to the Norwegian "variant" of a custom that was widespread in a much larger area. The phenomenon of animal warriors actually goes the borders of Scandinavia. Several archaeological finds show the importance of these traditions, e.g. in the Alamannic region (sword sheath from Gutenstein, bronze fragment from Obrigheim).⁷⁹

According to the most likely theory, the stem of the compound *ber-serkr* is from **ber-* (*ursus*).⁸⁰ This root refers to an early stage of Scandinavian language development, which corresponds to Proto-Nordic (before the 8th century). From the 9th century at the latest, the word *berserkr* gradually acquired a meaning beyond its original, actual meaning ("bear shirt", "warrior dressed in a bearskin") has a more general meaning, and it all animal warriors are generally summarized under this term. Verse 21 of the *Haraldskvæði* also gives these warriors the name *úlfheðnar* ("wolf shirt", "warrior clothed with a wolf skin").⁸¹

78 Gerard Breen emphasizes the diversity of the narrative roles of berserkers within a literary genre, sometimes even in the same text. He that some stereotypes existed in parallel very early on ("from an early stage", cf. Breen 1999a, pp. 152-158). Such a hypothesis seems questionable. The first written sources were composed after the end of the Viking Age: The overlapping of different traditions at a time when the beast warriors already disappeared is sufficient to explain the appearance of conflicting figures. Among the oldest Old Norse sources that mention the berserkers, the only contemporary work on the events described (*Haraldskvæði*) paints a coherent picture of the phenomenon, in contrast to many later works.

79 Chap. IX on the archaeological material of the first half of the 7th century.

80 Cf. chapter II.

81 However, the poets of this period still seem to have understood the etymological meaning of the compound *ber-serkr*. In stanza 8 of *Haraldskvæði*, the generic names *heðinn* and *berserkr* are used side by side in two phrases that are very similar in style and content (*grenjuðu berserkir [. . .] emjuðu úlfheðnar*). Here the skald is obviously playing with the "archaic" meaning of the word *berserkr*: In both cases, the name of an animal (**ber-*; *úlfi*) is associated with a garment (*serkr*, *heðinn*). However, the animal warriors described in this verse are not wearing bearskins, as the same henchmen are described in verse 21 with the name *úlfheðnar*! It should be borne in mind, however, that the fragments in which the different verses have survived cannot all be attributed to the same author. Nevertheless, all these stanzas were written in the same era by skalds who belonged to the same milieu. The term *berserkr* therefore refers to the same warriors in both fragments.

With the exception of *Haraldskvæði*, the berserkers mentioned in the skaldic poems are of dubious historicity⁸² or are based on legendary figures.⁸³ This also applies to the mythological figures in Eddic poetry (*Hyndluljóð*, str. 24; *Hárbarðljóð*, str. 37-39) as well as to the animal warriors in the *Snorra Edda*.⁽⁸⁴⁾

In the entire corpus of Icelandic sagas, the berserkers can be divided into three main categories. First, the term refers - in a limited number of *Konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur* (see chapters III and V above) - to elite warriors and members of a (mostly royal) retinue, such as the beast warriors of King Haraldr hárfagrís. In most *Íslendingasögur*, however, the berserkers are described as feared duelists and highwaymen. Even though they belong to a warrior race, they have undignified traits and are portrayed as boastful and vicious. Although some come from Sweden, they mainly rage in Norway and Iceland, where they are usually greeted with hostility by the local population. In the *Fornaldarsögur* and *Riddarasögur*, the word *berserkr* refers to extremely diverse legendary or fairytale-like figures, for whose description realism often plays no role, although some berserkers are also listed as elite warriors in the service of a king, albeit without any claim to historicity (see Chapter VII above).

The *berserksgangr*, which attacks the berserker with indomitable force, is associated with two very different ideas. Sometimes it is described as a fit of heroic *furor* inspired by (see above introduction and chap. VI), sometimes as an epileptic or hysterical illness (cf., , Þórir Ingimundarson in the *Vatnsdæla saga*⁸⁵ and some penal provisions in the *Grágás*).⁸⁶

The image that Óláfr's contemporaries had of the beast warriors can be reconstructed to some extent from all these contradictory statements about them. During the first half of the 11th century, the term *berserkr* seems to denote a very low social status. According to the *Grettis saga*⁸⁷, Norwegian berserkers were largely ostracized during this period. Equated with highwaymen (*ránsmenn*), they were expelled from the country by Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson shortly after the year 1000.

82 Cf. the verse of Víga-Stýrr, which was possibly composed towards the end of the 9th century and is quoted in the *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), p. 75 cf. also *Skj.* A:1, p. 116, B:1, p. 111).

83 Cf. *Íslendingadrápa* attributed to the Icelandic skald Haukr Valdísarson (12th century, *Skj.* A:1, p. 558, B:1, p. 543), or the stanzas of the *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Boer (ed.) 1892), p. 52; also *Qrv.* III-2 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 290, B:2, p. 311) and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* (p. 155; also *Skj.* A:2, p. 288, B:2, p. 309).

84 Cf. *Gylfaginning*, ch. XLIX (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 65).

85 *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), pp. 83 and 97 f.

86 Cf. the *Kristinna laga þáttur*, in *Grágás* (Vilhjálmur Finsen (ed./trans.) 1852), I, p. 23.

87 *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 61.

By the time of the skald Sigvatr, the honorable image of the berserker was finally a thing of the past. The memory of the elite warriors of the pre-Christian era survived only in the poetic heritage, in old stories and mythological traditions. In everyday use, the name *berserkr* had lost any positive connotation and was only used in a negative way to describe unscrupulous warriors and common robbers. Such an odium is a far cry from the heroic glory of the warriors of Hafrsfjord, whose bravery was immortalized by the skalds of King Haraldr hárfagri. Incidentally, Haraldr is the last king of Norway of whom the Old Norse sources report that he berserkers into his service.

Under these circumstances, the *lendr maðr Þórir hundr* could of course not have been described as a berserker by the poet of *Erfidrápa*. Despite his supposed connections to the Sami sorcerers, Þórir has nothing in common with a shady character: on the contrary, he is one of the most powerful leaders in Ha-logaland. His followers, who surround him on the battlefield, are portrayed as chosen warriors. According to the Legendary Saga, they are *hundunar* ("dogs") by King Óláfr. In fact, the eleven fur-clad warriors gather like a pack around, the great "dog". The epithet *hundr*, which is not infrequently borne by people of noble descent, is based on an onomastic tradition deeply rooted in Old Norse.⁸⁸ Around the year 1000, one of the sons of the Orcadian jarl is known as *Hvelpr eða Hundi*⁸⁹ (the Old Norse *hvelpr* denotes a puppy, cf. adän. *Hwelp*, ae. *Welp*, Frank. *Welf* etc.).⁹⁰ In Þórir's family, the epithet *hundr* passes to his great-grandson Sigurðr.⁹¹ Such an epithet does not imply a scolding character, as the expression *hugstórr hundr* ("brave dog") from the mouth of the skald Sigvatr attests.

In other contexts, both in hagiographic literature and in the translation of *chansons de geste* into Old Norse (*Riddarasögur*), the Christian authors use the image of the dog in a disreputable way, comparing the followers of paganism to this animal, especially through the expression *heiðinn sem hundr* ("pagan like a dog").⁹² In all likelihood, such a formulation originates from an ecclesiastical text, which is in agreement with the doctrine of the

⁸⁸ Cf. Müller 1970, pp. 69-73 with several continental Germanic parallels.

⁸⁹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Hkr), ch. XLVII, p. 347.

⁹⁰ Müller 1970, p. 72 f.

⁹¹ *Magnúss saga góða*, ch. XLVII, p. 23.

⁹² Especially in the *Karlamagnús saga ok kappá hans*, chap. IX, p. 381. For further references, see the study by Dillmann 2001; Bühner-Thierry 2002.

The aversion to the dog, which is regarded as a symbol of impurity, is part of a value system that is alien to the North⁹⁵ and breaks with indigenous traditions. Among the Germans, the connection to domesticated animals into the grave, as is clearly shown by the mourning customs.⁹⁶ In many Indo-European cultures, the dog is attributed the function of a soul companion.⁹⁷ This animal also appears alongside the wolf in the "wild hunt".⁹⁸ And folklore also likes to call wolves the "dogs of God".⁹⁹ Norse mythology to dogs the ability to recognize Óðinn, even if he hides his identity.¹⁰⁰ In medieval literature, the barking of dogs is also associated with the fury of warriors.¹⁰¹ The epithet *hundr* therefore fits wonderfully, whose

93 Cf. e.g. Mt 7, 6: *Nolite dare sanctum canibus* (*Biblia vulgata*, Vercellone (ed.) 1861, p. 645).

94 Dillmann 2001, p. 130.

95 Cf. inter alia Loth 1994 and further references in Dillmann 2001, p. 130, note 67.

96 There is archaeological evidence of numerous dogs in Germanic cemeteries; see Makiewicz 2000, pp. 219-232; Paul 1981, pp. 75-78; Prummel 1992; Gräslund 2004. In addition, there is the legend of the 'dog king', which is handed down in several Scandinavian sources (*Chronicum Lethrense*; the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, VII, ix, 4; the *Heimskringla* of Snorri Sturluson, chap. XII of the *Hákonar saga góða*) and possibly represents a memory of very old sacrificial cults (cf. Weiser-Aall 1933a and 1933b. See also the summary by Paul 1981, pp. 96-101).

97 Cf. among others Schlerath 1954, p. 27 f. and Kretschmar 1938. According to the Eddic poem *Baldurs draumar*

(Str. 2), Óðinn meets a dog on his way to Hel, the abode of the dead. Incidentally, this god is also the "Lord of the Dead" (*drauga-dróttinn*, cf. *Ynglinga saga*, chap. VII).

98 Cf. Höfler 1934, p. 37 f. and 55 f. The medieval legend of the "wild hunt", which was associated with

is related to the myth of the "army of the dead", shows traces of an ancient connection between the world of warriors and the afterlife (cf. e.g. Hünnerkopf 1927; Huth 1935; Meisen 1935; de Vries 1963; Walter 1997; Lecouteux 1999).

99 In the 18th century, a member of a group of Livonian werewolves introduced himself to his judges in Jürgensburg as "God's dog": *The teüffel would have nothing to do with him, but he, [. . .] would be God's dog [. . .]*. During the trial in 1691, the accused described his helpers as *God's friends and hounds* (quoted by Höfler 1934, p. 345 f.; cf. also the edition of the files by von Bruiningk 1924). The Baltic and Germanic traditions seem to overlap here. With reference to Jakob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, Höfler (1934, pp. 43, 279, note 19, p. 356, note 38) also quotes this verse by Hans Sachs: *Nach-dem der Herr all creatur / Auff erd beschuff gar rain und pur / Die wolff er im erwelen kund / Und her sie bey im für jagdhund, / Das er sich inn den refiren / Wer den von den anderen wilden thieren*. This Nuremberg poet, a Renaissance man, also regarded wolves as "dogs of God".

100 Cf. the prose introduction to the *Grimnismál* (p. 56 f.), in which the goddess Frigg explains that Óðinn

in the guise of a magician (*fiðlkunnigr maðr*) can be recognized by the fact that the wildest dogs do not dare to attack him (*Frigg [. . .] sagði þat marc á, at engi hundr var svá ólmr, at á hann myndi hlaupa, "Frigg . . . called this a sign that no dog was so bad that it would attack him."*).

101 In chapter XIX of the *Grettis saga* "howl [the berserkers] like dogs" (*grenja sem hundar*). Cf. also in Saxo Grammaticus (V, iii, 9) the twelve sons of Westmarus, whose behavior is reminiscent of animal warriors: *Qui, applicante se ipsis Erico, ululantium more luporum horridas dedere voces*.

The name emphasizes the heroic character of Óláfr's opponents. The name also emphasizes the heroic character of Óláfr's opponents. Like the wolf, the dog occupies an important position in the martial symbolism of the Germanic world,¹⁰² be it in the context of family feuds¹⁰³ or of allegiances or warlike alliances of men (cf. the troops of the "dog-headed" Lombards). According to Martha Paul, the group of Þórircompanions illustrates this last aspect: "it is clear from the sources that the warriors were equated with dogs. They too, like the Cinocephali of the Lombards, are the fighting force of a tribe; the dog symbol is linked to this warlike group of men and does not characterize the entire tribe."¹⁰⁴

Rex strepitum inhibere coepit, docens non debere pectoribushumanis ferinos inesse sonos. Subiunxit Ericus canum hunc esse morem, ut uno inchoante ceteri latratum edant, quod propriam cuncti moribus originem prodant ac suum quisque genus fateatur. The sons of Westmarus - skilled in magic and pagan rituals (cf. the scene with the horse sacrifice, V, ii, 7) - harass strangers by hanging or burning them for show (VII, i, 11). It is tempting to draw a comparison with the initiation rites that Óðinn undergoes in the *Hávamál* or the *Grímnismál*.

102 The same applies to the Celtic tradition, in which the dog associated with the warrior: the hero Cúchulainn is the "dog of Culann".

103 Cf. the rival dynasties of the *Hundingar* and the *Ylfingar*, which are described in two Eddic Geopems are quoted: *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* and *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana qnnor*. Helgi, King Hunding's opponent, belongs to the *Ylfingar* family. The name appears frequently in Old Norse sources. The *Ynglinga saga* (ch. XXXVII, p. 67) mentions a king Hjørvarðr Ylfingr. In the *Fornkonunga saga* a certain *Hjörmundr konungr, sonr Herva- rðar Ylfings* appears (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 375). The *Ylfingar* family is also mentioned in *Hyndluljóð*, Str. 11 and in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 183, on *Eiríkr inn mál- spaki*). The name Hundingus corresponds to the Old Norse Hundingr. Several persons in the *Gesta Danorum* bear it: Hundingus, king of the Swedes (I, viii, 17, 27 and II, ii, 1); Hundingus, opponent of Frotho (II, iv, 1); Hundingus, son of Syricus, king of the Saxons (II, v, 3, 6); Hundin- gus, administrator of Zealand (VII, ix, 1 and VII, ix, 4). Incidentally, the Saxon Hundingus is killed by Helgo, the son of Haldanus, who also bears the epithet *Hundingi interemptor* (this is, of course, the Helgi of the Eddic songs. On the song cycle about Helgi, see above all Ebenbauer 1970). Outside the Scandinavian world, Anglo-Saxon tradition also recalls the *Wylfingas* (*Beowulf*, v. 461, 471; *Widsith*, v. 29; Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I, 15), and in Old High German texts the name *Wülfingen*, which belongs to the family of Hildebrant (*Wolfdietrich*, D, X, 121; *Biterolf*, v. 6357 f., where they are to as the *cool Wülfingen*: Wolfbrant, Wolfwin and Wolfhart). Hildiribrand also bears the epithet *Yl- fingr* in the *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, the Old Norse version of the German heroic epic (Bertelsen (ed.) 1905-1911, 2, pp. 344, 351, 353). Much (1924, p. 109) has suggested locating the conflict between the *Hundingar* and the *Ylfingar* on the lower Elbe near the town of Stade (cf. the expression *apud Stadium oppidum* in Saxo). He identifies the *Hundingars* with the Lombards, a branch of whom apparently settled in this area in early times.

104 Paul 1981, p. 89.

From this perspective, the type of fur worn by Þórir's followers is of little importance. This clothing is not intended to faithfully reproduce the appearance of canids, but to reveal the deeper nature of the animal warrior beyond the appearance of the disguise.

The clothing worn by Þórir's companions varies according to the author. Snorri Sturluson's image of the *hreinbjálfar* undoubtedly stems from a connection with the motif of the Sami magicians; the word *vargskinnsstakkar* in the *Legendary Saga*, however, reveals that it is an imitation of a topos that was already well known in Old Icelandic literature. Both works are based on now-lost sources that contained the first versions of the story of the holy Óláfr. These probably described Þórir's companions as being dressed in furs, without going into the exact nature of the furs. At least this the theory of Karl Maurer and Otto Höfler.¹⁰⁵

The strange figure of Þórir hundr, half hidden under the fur of a wild animal, seems to have come from the depths of time. It is clearly reminiscent of the animal warrior depicted by a Swedish artist four centuries earlier on one of the matrices of Torslunda.

¹⁰⁵ Maurer 1867, p. 575. This theory was taken up again by Höfler 1940, p. 112, note 52.

Chapter IX

Archaeological and epigraphic records

In Scandinavia and in the continental Germanic area, archaeological evidence attests to the use of zoomorphic masks and animal skins in rituals closely associated with warrior traditions.

Iconographic evidence for the use of animal symbols has existed since the Bronze Age. However, it will hardly be possible to trace the tradition of animal warriors - at least in the form described in the Old Norse sources - back to such an early period.

It must remain an attempt to prove the continuity of this tradition from the 1st century AD onwards, as the social structures and religious beliefs of the Germanic world underwent some profound developments in the centuries around the birth of Christ, sometimes resulting from internal factors, sometimes from contacts with other (including Celtic and Mediterranean) cultures.

The fact that the *Germania libera* was not exempt from the influence of Roman imperial costume is clearly demonstrated not least by the numerous transfers from the "late Roman treasure trove of motifs" into the pre-Christian Nordic pictorial tradition. Nevertheless, the theses that interpret the tradition of animal warriors as a pure imitation of foreign models borrowed from gladiatorial combat or the Roman cult of Mithras (see Chapter I above) are not very convincing. Rather, the phenomenon appears to be closely linked to the development of a Germanic elite warfare during the late Roman imperial period and the Migration Period. At this time, 'central places' emerged in the north, such as Gudme, where the cults and beliefs associated with the sacral, 'lordly' function (in the sense of Dumézil's three-function theory) (especially the cult of⁽²⁾ an important role.

At the same time, the animal style in Germanic art began in the 5th century (Salin I, followed by Salin II from the first half of the 6th century). The development of this artistic style was certainly a complex process, in the course of which the Nordic tradition was merged with foreign influences, including those from steppe cultures. The symbolic content of the animal style evokes an imaginary world in which the animal warriors naturally find their place⁽³⁾.

1 Zeiss 1941, p. 41.

2 On the connection between central places and Old Norse religion see, among others, Hedeager 2001; Hedeager 2002; Sundqvist 2004a; Sundqvist 2011; Jørgensen 2009.

3 At this point, reference should be made to the work of Hedeager (2000; 2004) and Høilund Nielsen (1997a; 1997b; 1998; 1999; 2002). In this context, the weapons decorated with animal figures are

However, the most valuable archaeological sources on the beast warriors date from the 6th and 7th centuries. The ornamental motifs used in this period have left deep traces in the Nordic tradition, and some of them still appear on objects from the Viking Age. On these sources, the figure of the beast warrior is essentially depicted as a warrior dressed in a wolfskin⁽⁴⁾.

A The motif of the wolf warrior

1 The matrices of Torslunda

The four small bronze stamps, which were found by chance on the Swedish island of Öland in 1870, are now kept in the *Statens Historiska Museet* in Stockholm with the inventory number 4325. The motifs on these objects have long been the focus of research.⁵ They can be interpreted in part by reference to Old Norse mythology.

first die-cut (motif A, see fig. 1, bottom left)⁶ a warrior armed with sword and dagger fighting two bears.⁷ Whether the man

The two bear figurines from the Vendel period (including the two bear figurines on the spearhead of Vendel, grave 12) are also worthy of mention, see Lamm/Rundqvist 2005.

4 Cf. Høilund Nielsen 2011, p. 624 f.

5 Montelius 1877 (p. 286, Fig. 338) one of the first scientific publications to mention the Torslunda punches.

6 The classification used here (from A to D) corresponds to that of Bruce-Mitford 1968. Beck 1968a uses the same sequence, but designates the punches with Roman numerals (I to IV).

7 This motif is clearly reminiscent of the decoration of the bag fitting found in Sutton Hoo and of one of the ornamental fragments of the helmet of Valsgärde VII (for a comparative study of these motifs, see Hauck 1982b, pp. 353 f.). The interpretation proposed by Holmqvist (1939, p. 147 f.), which links this depiction to the biblical story of Daniel in the den of lions, was refuted by Beck (1968a, p. 239): Daniel is saved by divine intervention and not by his own efforts; moreover, the animals depicted on the Torslunda matrices are obviously bears (the Sutton Hoo bag, on the other hand, may depict wolves). A similar motif can also be found on the embroidery on a shirt found in a mound in the cemetery of Högom, Sweden. The 5th century grave contains the remains of a warrior of high , who was laid down on a bearskin. The archaeologist Lise Bender Jørgensen (2001; 2003) interprets the motifs on the clothing of the man from Högom in connection with the tradition of animal warriors. On the embroidery of Högom, see the study by Nockert 1991. On the excavations and the archaeological context, see Ramqvist 1992.



Fig. 1: Matrices from Torslunda, Sweden (Photographs: Sören Hallgren, Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm).

It is not possible to say for certain whether the man wears a bralette or is dressed in a smock made of coarsely woven fabric or fur.

The man on the second die-cut (motif B, see fig. 1, top left) has similar features to the one in motif A (shape of the face, moustache, eyes, hairstyle). However, he is depicted in a completely different position: Bare-chested⁸, he wields an axe in his gloved right hand, while his left hand holds a rope looped around the neck of a monstrous animal - perhaps a bear.⁹

⁸ This figure appears to be wearing shaggy loden or fur trousers.

⁹ Beck (1968a, p. 239) emphasizes that the image of this animal - which lacks any realism - does not correspond to a specific animal species: "This depiction combines zoologically so contradictory individual characteristics that cannot think of a realistic reproduction of a natural model." Nevertheless, he describes the creature as a "cat-shaped monster", primarily to the shape of the claws. Beck also recalls the Old Norse term *kattarkyn*, which is used in *the Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* (ch. IV, p. 370). The shape of the animal is reminiscent of the stance of a sole walker - although it is difficult to say for sure. A similar scene can be found on the helmet of Vendel I (both motifs are depicted in Beck

The third die-cut (motif C, see fig. 1, top right) shows two warriors striding towards each other. Both men hold a downward-pointing lance in their right hand and carry a sword on their left side, as well as helmets whose crest consists of a mighty boar figure.¹⁰ A ring of considerable size is attached to the sword hilt of the warrior on the left⁽¹¹⁾

The last die-cut (motif D, see fig. 1, bottom right) also shows two warriors whose depiction gives the impression of a ritual act - possibly preceding a battle. The person on the right is dressed from head to toe in a wolf's pelt. He is unsheathing his sword and pointing his lance towards the ground. The figure on the left is obviously one-eyed.¹² She appears to be performing a dance step while holding a lance in each hand. At her side hangs a sword, the pommel of which is possibly decorated with a ring.¹³ The "weapon dancer" wears a horned helmet adorned with two bird heads.

All four punches, which are made of distinctly different alloys,¹⁴ are of different sizes: A and B have an approximate side length of 4.5 cm, with an average thickness of about 3 mm; C and D are slightly larger and thinner¹⁵.

1964, plate 1, figs. 2 and 3; in contrast to the figure from Torslunda, the warrior on the helmet plate from Vendel 1 is dressed in a skirt; he is not wearing gloves).

10 Warriors with boar helmets are depicted on several Swedish helmet plates from this period (Vendel 1, Valsgärde VII and VIII, cf. Hauck 1981a); in the Anglo-Saxon area, the helmet of Benty Grange, which bears a sculptural boar figure, should be mentioned (cf. Capelle 1990, p. 71); both in Anglo-Saxon and in Old Norse poetry, the helmet designations often have a reference to boar symbolism (cf. Beck 1965, pp. 4-33).

11 Similar scenes appear on the helmet of Vendel XIV (cf. Arent 1969, plate 14).

12 The face clearly shows an empty eye socket - a detail first noted by Oxenstierna in 1956, p. 150, plate 171. According to Oxenstierna, this peculiarity is obviously the result of a deliberate action by the artist and not due to incompetence or a later mishap (Hauck 1954, p. 47 and note 204). More recent studies have confirmed the accuracy of this discovery (cf. Arrhenius / Freij 1992). Cf. also Hauck 1981b, p. 218, note 60; Bruce-Mitford 1974, p. 208 (with plate 54 c) and 214-219.

13 This detail, which barely visible in most of the illustrations, appears in a drawing by H. Lange, which is reproduced in several essays by Karl Hauck (cf. among others Hauck 1980b, p. 289; Hauck 1982b, p. 330; cf. also Hauck 1978, p. 42 f. and Pl. XI, fig. 16; on this punch, see also Bruce-Mitford 1974, pp. 208, 214 f.; Bruce-Mitford / Bimson (eds.) 1978, p. 566 f., fig. 416 b).

14 Cf. the results of the analysis by Bruce-Mitford 1968, p. 235 and his observations on the dies before they were cleaned (Bruce-Mitford 1968, p. 234). Dies A and B were made of almost identical alloys, while die C contains more copper and die D more tin.

15 The dimensions given by Bruce-Mitford (Bruce-Mitford 1968) are as follows (in cm, in the order "top - bottom - left - right"): A [4.5-4.75 - 4.5-4.6]; B [4-4.5-4.5 - 4.6]; C [5.5- 5.5 - 4.7-4.7]; D [5.6-5.6 - 4.8-4.8]. The thickness and weight are each 4 to 4.5 mm and

A and B are also much finer models. Both die-cuts were obviously made by the same artist, which cannot be proven for C and D.

In all probability, these four punches were as pressed sheet metal models for the production of helmet decorations. Decorative elements of a similar kind can be found on the helmets¹⁶ from the tombs of Vendel,¹⁷ Valsgärde¹⁸ and Sutton Hoo.¹⁹

Die-cuts C and D show signs of wear, in contrast to die-cuts A and B, whose reverse side appears much smoother. Bruce-Mitford blames this on different usage techniques. According to this hypothesis, the fronts of punches A and B were pressed onto the metal to be decorated and the hammer blows were applied to their backs, while punches C and D were used in the opposite way, with the metal to be decorated with the motif being hammered directly onto the front of the press plate models.²⁰ Morten Axboe proposes another theory, namely that C and D were not original dies, but crude, cast copies modeled on press plates that are said to have come from a used helmet.²¹

The origin of the punches, which were found under a pile of stones near the village of Björnhovda (Torslunda municipality), remains unclear. Their place of origin was not determined before 1940.⁽²²⁾ The excavations that took place there from 1968 onwards brought to light several metal fragments, remains of artistic activity, especially bronze casting. It cannot therefore be ruled out that the four punches were locally manufactured products. However, the alloys used do not necessarily have to come from the island of Öland, as they show similarities with other metal products from the Merovingian period.⁽²³⁾

Archaeologists have excavated the remains of three houses in Björnhovda, some of which date back to the 5th and 6th centuries. This work brought to light a

62.52 gr (for A); 3.5 to 4 mm and 57.1 g (for B); 2 to 2.5 mm and 32.52 g (for C); 2.5 to 3 mm and 38 g (for D).

16 On Scandinavian helmets of the Vendel period, archaeologists refer to as 'crested helmets', see above all Böhner 1994, pp. 533-549; Steuer 1999, pp. 332 f. A distribution map of helmets of this type can be found in Steuer 1987, p. 199 (with a bibliography on pp. 230 f.).

17 The helmets of tombs I, XII and XIV; see especially Stolpe / Arne 1912, plates V, VI, XXXVI, XLI, XLII (cf. also Stolpe / Arne 1927); Lindqvist 1950.

18 The helmets of tombs VII and VIII. Cf. Arwidsson 1977; Arwidsson 1954, especially figs. 78 and 79.

19 Cf. above all Bruce-Mitford / Bimson (eds.) 1978; Maryon 1947; Marzinzik 2007.

20 Cf. Bruce-Mitford 1968, p. 234 f.

21 Axboe 1987.

22 Cf. Hagberg 1976, p. 323.

23 Cf. Hagberg 1976, p. 331 f.; Capelle / Vierck 1971.

A number of different materials were brought to light (animal bones, a skate made of horse bones, pottery and glass fragments, a piece of amber, a finger ring, a handle comb etc.).²⁴ Several coins were also found in Björnhovda, including a hoard of 36 *solidi* with coins of Roman and Byzantine rulers of the 5th century⁽²⁵⁾.

In 1860, an extraordinary piece of jewelry was also found in the nearby area. It is the magnificent gold collar from Färjestaden, which probably dates to the same period as the *solidi*.²⁶ Long before the Viking Age, the social elite on the island of Öland enjoyed an extremely high standard of living and was by no means cut off from far-reaching economic currents and external cultural influences.

Religion naturally a special position in this society, as the place names testify: Torslunda refers to a sacred forest (cf. an. *lundr*, aschw. *lunder*, "forest, grove") dedicated to the god Þórr.²⁷ The name Björnhovda is less explicitly reminiscent of a place of worship, but possibly refers to a rocky outcrop in the shape of a bear's head (cf. the Old Swedish nouns *biorn* and *hovub*).²⁸ However, this etymological interpretation does not exclude the reference to a religious symbolic content, which is directly linked to the iconography of the Torslunda stanzas.²⁹ Stanzas A and B do indeed appear depict bears. This animal played an important role in the beliefs and customs of the old North³⁰ - as evidenced, for example, by hides found in Iron Age graves (on the island of Öland, among others), which, according to Åke Ström, must be associated with the Óðinn cult.³¹ The "Odin" impression of the Torslunda punches is

24 A complete overview with illustrations can be found in Hagberg 1976.

25 Hagberg 1976, p. 333 and 2006, p. 79; Fagerlie 1967, p. 194 f.

26 Cf. Hagberg 1976, p. 334; Holmqvist 1972, p. 238 f.; Holmqvist 1980; Baudou 1994, p. 118; Lamm 1998.

27 Torslunda is a characteristic plural form for settlement names. Before it was transferred to a settlement, the name was probably originally in the singular as the name of a place of worship (cf. Nydam 2006). Similar place names are documented in various areas in Sweden and Denmark; cf. Olsen 1939, pp. 79, 80, 112; Hald 1965; Laur 2001; Wahlberg 2003.

28 Cf. Hagberg 1976, p. 335.

29 Cf. Göransson 1968, p. 68.

30 Cf. among others the summaries by de Vries 1970, I, p. 362 f.; Ranke / Reichstein 1976, The bear occupies a prominent position in the imagination of the European peoples, as Philippe Walter 2002 and Pastoureau 2007 have recently shown. For the Nordic culture, see also Edsman 1994 and 1996.

31 Åke Ström 1980 These graves usually belong to people of higher social status (men or women). Bear claws were found, for example, in the manorial graves in Gamla Uppsala. Cf. Remains of bearskins were discovered in women's graves from the Roman Imperial period on Öland (Brostorp cemetery) (cf. Hagberg 1976, p. 335 and Hagberg 2006, p. 79). For information on the bear in Northern European Iron Age graves, see Grimm 2013; Beermann 2016.

However, it is above all the scene of motif D, in which a wolf warrior precedes a "one-eyed dancer", that arouses the imagination. In all probability, the latter embodies the divine ruler Óðinn, who, according to the tradition of *Gylfaginning* (ch. XV)³², once sacrificed one of his eyes at the well of Mímir in order to gain wisdom.

Many parallels can be found for the headdress with bird's head protomes worn by Óðinn on Stanze D of Torslunda, which lend a type-like character to this iconographic motif often found pictorial monuments of the Vendel or Viking Age (cf. among others the decorations on the helmets of Valsgärde and Sutton Hoo, the buckle from Finglesham (see Fig. 2),³³ the textile fragments from Oseberg,³⁴ the figures from Birka and Ekhammar³⁵ as well as various attachments, pendants, tool handles or coins depicting a weapon dancer with a horned helmet or a horned man's head).³⁶



Fig. 2: Belt buckle from Finglesham (photograph by Sonia Chadwick-Hawkes in: Chadwick-Hawkes / Ellis Davidson / Hawkes 1965, p. 16, plate IV a).

32 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), p. 22, with the quotation of str. 58 of the *Völuspá*.

33 Cf. Hauck 1981a, p. 205 and Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, p. 486. On the Finglesham buckle, which was found in an Anglo-Saxon grave in Kent, see Chadwick-Hawkes / Ellis Davidson / Hawkes 1965 and Ellis Davidson 1972, p. 12 f.

34 Cf. Christensen 1992, p. 244. On the tomb of Oseberg see also Christensen / Ingstad / Myhre 1992 ; Ingstad 1995; Pesch 1999.

35 On the figures of Birka and Ekhammar, see Ringquist 1969.

36 Cf. the presentation of this archaeological material in Helmbrecht 2007a, 2007b, 2007/2008 and Helmbrecht 2011, p. 140 f. Animal head protomes are also found as shield signs of a barbarian auxiliary unit of the Roman army (*cornuti*, 'the horned ones') in the *Notitia Dignitatum* in the 5th century (cf. Alföldi 1959).

The small human figures equipped with horned helmets that appear on the helmet plates of Valsgärde VII and Valsgärde VIII (see fig. 3) accompany a mounted warrior, whose lance they steer. In this way they undoubtedly determine the battle as helpers in victory. Karl Hauck associates these Vendelian symbols with the Indo-European cult of the Dioscuri³⁷ and interprets the small victory helpers of Valsgärde as "individual Dioscuri" who "are depicted with the helmet of the god of war".³⁸ They are to be seen as "representatives of the gods' assistance in battle" and as "accompanying gods of the god who moved into the role of the old god of war and heaven with all-god claims" (i.e. Óðinn).³⁹ In his study of the Vendelian pictorial monuments, Heinrich Beck points out that the motif of the "battle commander and leader in the guise of the gods" is well known in Old Norse literature.⁴⁰ In the *Vellekla* Einarr skálaglamms, the following verses refer to the victorious battle actions of Hákon Jarl: *hver sé íf, nema jöfra ættrýri goð stýra?* ("Can there be any doubt that gods direct the destroyer of the clans of princes?").⁴¹ In the same stanza it is mentioned that "Óðinn got the fallen" (*hlaut Óðinn val*). In a stanza of the *Gráfeldardrápa*, the poet attributes a similar guidance by the gods to King Haraldr gráfeldr: *þrafna byrjar þeim stýrðu goð Beima* ("The gods guided the king"; literally: "this Beimi [sea king] of the sticks of the wind [ships] was guided by the gods"). The king is even referred to with Óðinn as a god

37 On the Dioscuri in ancient Germanic religion, see Wagner 1960; Rosenfeld 1963; Ward 1968; de Vries 1970, 2, §§ 496-500; O'Brien 1982; Hauck 1983; Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984. The Germans had worshipped the Dioscuri since ancient times, as attested by Tacitus, among others (cf. the twin gods Alci among the Naharvals in *Germania*, XLIII). The pairs of brothers or The pairs of brothers or dual leaders Hengest and Horsa among the Anglo-Saxons (Beda, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, I, 15), Raos and Raptos among the Vandal Hasdingi (Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, LXXI, 12) and Ibor and Aio among the Lombard Winnili (Paulus Diaconus 1, 7) probably represented an incarnation of the Dioscuri in the eyes of their respective peoples, whose task it is to bring about victory in battle.

38 Cf. Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, p. 487. On other helmet plates (Valsgärde and Sutton Hoo), the Dioscuri are depicted as twins performing a weapons dance with lances and swords. These figures also wear horned helmets. On some pictorial monuments, the Dioscuri appear in the form of birds or horses. See, for example, the ornamental pair of horses on the helmet plate of Valsgärde VIII (Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, p. 490) and the horse-shaped pair of dioscuri on the Norwegian bracteate from Godøy (Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, plate 32). Hauck (1980b and 1981a) points out that Dioscuri are also depicted on Roman weapons alongside the god Mars, who is equated with Óðinn/Wotan in the *interpretatio romana*.

39 Cf. Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, p. 485. See also Ellis Davidson 1965. A single thioskur also appears on the Pliezhausen equestrian disc as a victor, albeit without a horned helmet (Hauck / Rosenfeld 1984, p. 488). Hauck (1957b, p. 362) regards this figure as the Germanic counterpart of the ancient allegory of the *numen victoriae*. On the pictorial monuments with depictions of the "superhuman fighting aid", see also Hauck 1994, p. 224 f.

40 Beck 1964, p. 32 f.

41 Cf. *Skaldic Poetry*, I. 1, Part 1, p. 322 f.

of victories: *þar vas sigtýr sjalfr í sækialfi dýra Atals* ("in Harald was Óðinn himself"; literally: "In Atals [sea king] animals [ships] attacking Alf was Sig-Týr [Óðinn] himself").⁴² On Stanze D of Torslunda, Óðinn, who precedes the wolf warrior into battle, is probably depicted in his role as a victorious hero⁽⁴³⁾



Fig. 3: Motif of the helmet of Valsgärde VIII (drawing after Hauck 1980a, p. 502, fig. 27).

The stamps from Torslunda not only show religious beliefs, but very probably also depict the rituals and customs of the Scandinavian elites of the Vendel period. On motif D, the one-eyed god appears to be leaping in front of the wolf warrior while a lance in each hand. This unique stance - which is also common to all Vals-

42 Translation by Sprenger 1998, p. 556; see also *Skaldic Poetry*, I. 1, Part 1, p. 263 f.

43 According to Vang Petersen 2005 (p. 82 f.), the weapon dancer with a horned helmet on the Torslunda stanze could be interpreted as a depiction of a berserker. In connection with the etymological interpretation of the Old Norse word *berserkr*, which is based on the use of the adjective *berr* (*nudus*), the author refers to the nakedness of the weapon dancer. Based on the verses from the "Hafstrjard fragment", in which the animal warriors are mentioned (*Grenuþu berser- kir* (. . .) *emþuþu ulfheðnar*), Vang Petersen regards the motif D of Torslunda as the depiction of a berserker and a wolf warrior. However, it is unlikely that the Old Norse terms *berserkr* and *ulfheðnar* two separate categories of warriors recognizable by specific 'uniforms' (see above, chap. II).

gärde and Sutton Hoo (both in the small "victory helpers" and in the twin pairs performing a weapons dance, see fig. 4) - is reminiscent of war choreographies that were widespread in large parts of the Germanic world⁽⁴⁴⁾.

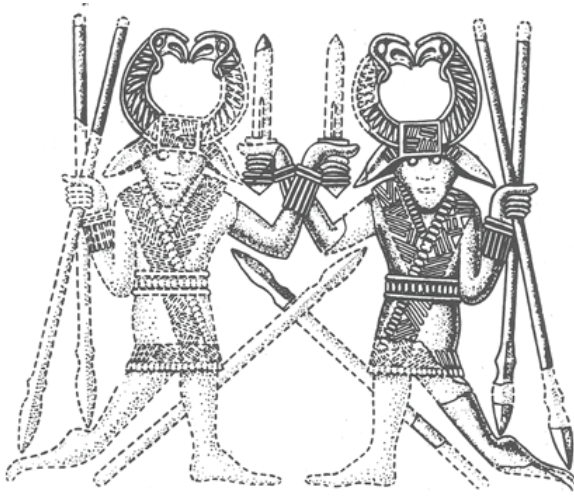


Fig. 4: Motif of the helmet of Sutton Hoo (drawing from Hauck 1980a, p. 492, fig. 13).

Tacitus (*Germania*, XXIV) provides a detailed description of this tradition, to which Heinrich Beck ascribes a cultic dimension - a finding that applies to all Indo-European societies⁽⁴⁵⁾ (mention should be made above all πυρρίχη of the Spartans;⁽⁴⁶⁾ the *tripudium* and the *saltatio* of the Salii, priests of Mars,⁽⁴⁷⁾ as well as the

44 On these "weapon dances" or "sword dances", Müllenhof 1871; Meschke 1931; Wolf-ram 1935-1938; Nedoma 2004.

45 Beck 1968a. Cf. also Stumpfl 1936, pp. 208, 321 and 442; Kershaw 2000, pp. 83 f.

46 On the Pyrrhic dance, see Strabon X, 4, 16. In Crete, this dance was attributed to the Curetes; among the Spartans, its origin is linked to the Dioscuri. Cf. .g. Seyffert 1964, p. 530.

47 The term *tripudium* appears several times in Saxo (cf. *Gesta* VI, v, 17). Tacitus (*Historiae*, V, xvii) also uses the word in connection with the Batavians of Civilis, who perform this weapon dance on the battlefield before the battle begins. On the Salii dedicated to Mars, see Gjerstad 1962, p. 28 f.; Wissowa 1912, p. 555. Von Schröder (1908, p. 147) compares the god Mars - who is described as the "leader of the warlike armored souls" - with Óðinn, the leader of the *einherjar*. According to him, the cult of Mars has its origins in an ancient *lar militaris* who was gradually transformed into an important divine figure. For von Schröder, the Salii the earthly images of a group lares. In the *Carmen Arvale* ("Song of the Arval Brothers"), the priests do indeed invoke the god Mars together with the lares. Furthermore

Dance of the Maruts, the companions of Indra⁴⁸). In the pre-Christian iconography of the Nordic peoples, the image of the weapon dancer is closely associated with the god Wodan (Germ. **Wōðanaz*, ahd. *Wuotan*, ae. *Woden*, an. *Óðinn*).⁴⁹ Snorri Sturluson describes him as the "lord of the berserkers",⁵⁰ with whom the wolf warriors (*úlfrheðnar*) are equated in some Old Norse sources⁽⁵¹⁾. Three centuries after the production of the Stanzas of Torslunda, skaldic poetry uses the same symbolism. As Heinrich Beck already seen,⁵² stanza 8 of *Háleygjatal*⁵³ reminds us of the protective, who is protecting one of his animal warriors.

the *lar militaris* ("protector of the battlefield") is depicted in Roman iconography as a young man with a lance, accompanied by a dog and clothed in the fur of this animal (Wissowa 1912, p. 171). Ancient authors (especially Varro) sometimes compared the lares with the manes, so a connection with ancestor worship cannot be ruled out (cf. Kershaw 2000, pp. 93 f. and 192). Furthermore, the wolf is one of the animals associated with Mars, especially in connection with the archaic custom of *ver sacrum* (cf. Kershaw 2000, p. 137).

48 On Indra, the "dancing" god, and the Marut, cf. von Schröder 1908, pp. 47 f. and 106 f.; Gonda 1960, p. 184. Gonda also recalls the *Aśvin*, twin riders who stand for the dawn. These deities, who are related to the Dioscuri, are depicted as "dancing heroes".

49 Hauck 1954, p. 48: "Odin-Woden himself is alive in the imagination of Germanic paganism as a weapon dancer. Weapon dancing and the Woden religion belong together as closely as the weapon dancing of the Roman Salians and the worship of Mars." For Hauck, the one-eyed dancer of Torslunda "certainly refers to Odin-Wotan in the weapon dance" (Hauck 1954, p. 47). Less convincing is Hauck's (ibid.) interpretation of Torslunda's Stanze D as a depiction of a cultic staging of the *ragnarök*, in which the masked warrior plays the role of the Fenris wolf as part of a cult drama. On the stanza, however, the animal warrior's gesture is not directly directed against the one-eyed dancer, Heinrich Beck (1968a, p. 239) rightly emphasizes: "the wolf-skinners spear is carefully placed behind the dancer's outstretched foot: it is therefore not a confrontation between the two armed men that is intended". This argument can also be used against the other interpretation of this pictorial monument proposed by Hauck in a later work, which is based on the motif of the battle between Høgni and Heðinn (Hauck 1957a; Paul 1981, pp. 137-139). Although this literary theme is closely linked to the eschatological idea of *Hjaðningavíg*, Hauck refers less to the Old Norse mythological tradition than to continental Germanic epic sources and pictorial representations (see below on the Gutenstein and Obrigheim fragments). In his most recent investigations, Hauck has abandoned this hypothesis in order to return to the Odinic interpretation of the weapon dancer - albeit without reference to a cult drama.

50 *Ynglinga saga*, p. 17 f.

51 *Haraldskvæði*, Str. 21; *Vatnsdæla saga* (Einar. Sveinsson (ed.) 1939), p. 24 f. and *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson (ed.) 1936), p. 5.

52 Beck 1968a, p. 247 f.

53 This verse is quoted by Snorri in the *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 149). The *Háleygjatal* was composed by Eyvindr skáldaspillr in honor of the Norwegian jarl Hákon of Lade after the victory at *Hjørungavágr*, which he won against the Vikings of Jomsborg around 985 (on this battle see, among others *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Hkr), pp. 329-331 as well as the various versions of the *Jömsvíkinga saga*). The powerful dynasty of the Jarle of Lade (an. *Hlaðir*, in the fjord

spurs him on to attack. He wears "the gray skirt of the wolf in the storm of the Highest".⁽⁵⁴⁾ With vivid words, the skald conjures up a striking image: the outline of the beast warrior suddenly emerges, his shoulders covered in dark fur, while the tall figure of the Lord of Asgard looms over the turmoil of battle.

The motif of matrix D - which dates long before the poem by Ey- vindr skáldaspillir - also illustrates the close connection between the god of war and his followers: the man in wolf's clothing (*úlfheðinn*) follows Óðinn at his heels and crosses his lance with him. In doing so, he places himself under the protection of the god even before the battle. As he enters the battlefield with his hand on his sword, the beast warrior raises his yawning wolf mask to the sky - as if to let out a long howl (see fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Die D from Torlsunda, with the wolf warrior flanked by a one-eyed "weapon dancer". (Photograph: Sören Hallgren, Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm).

The Håleygja Valley and the Stanzas of Torslunda, which were created in different eras, use different artistic expressions, but express similar ideas.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The mythological tradition,

of Trondheim) originally comes from Halogaland - hence the title of the genealogical poem, which literally means "enumeration of the Halogalands" (cf. Kreutzer 1999, among others). In it, the poet traces the lineage of Jarl Hákon back to the god Óðinn.

54 For the Old Norse text of this stanza and its translation, see chapter VI above.

55 Beck 1968a, p. 249: "This results in the following reading for the stanza of Torlsunda: an *úlfheðinn*, a wolf-skinner, prepares for battle with his jaws open threateningly. The one-eyed god of war, to whom the *úlfheðnar* are particularly attached, dances ahead of him, brandishing a spear. The skaldic formulation offers an adequate description of the pictorial formula: the hero carries the wolf's pelt into the battle of the one-eyed Odin."

which was deeply rooted in the memory of Scandinavia's elite, clearly reveals its continued existence here. Over the centuries, a similar worldview has united the warriors of Sweden's Vendel period with the last adherents of Norwegian paganism: in fact, the Ladejarl Hákon, in whose honor the skald Eyvindr wrote the *Háleygjatal*, is one of the last defenders of the old religion.

Nevertheless, the image of the wolf warrior is not exclusive to the Scandinavian world. It also appears in the iconography of the Alamannic cultural area, on the sword scabbard from Gutenstein and the bronze fragment from Obrigheim. These objects, contemporary to the stamps of Torslunda, prove the existence of the tradition of animal warriors in the continental Germanic area. The fact that the motif of the wolf warrior was also known in the Anglo-Saxon cultural area is clearly attested by the pressed sheet metal model of Fen Drayton (Cambridgeshire, 7th century, see Fig. 6) found in 2006.⁵⁶ A bronze figure armed with two spears and covered with bird's head protomes, reminiscent of the weapon dancer of Torslunda, also comes from Cambridgeshire.⁵⁷

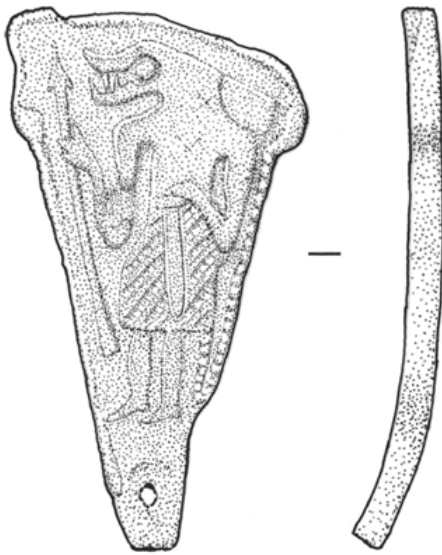


Fig. 6: Press plate model from Fen Drayton (Cambridgeshire), 7th century (after Leahy 2006, p. 278). Length: 56.2 mm, width: 30.9 mm, thickness: 3.3 mm, weight: 22.93 g.

⁵⁶ Cf. Leahy 2006, Oehrl 2017, pp. 16, 37.

⁵⁷ See Oehrl 2017, p. 39.

As the tradition of animal warriors was closely linked to the cult of Wotan, it proves to be an expression of the sacred dimension of the exercise of power (in the sense of Dumézil's three-function theory) in the context of pre-Christian allegiance.

2 The sword scabbard from Gutenstein and the bronze fragment from Obrigheim

In Gutenstein, a small village on the southern bank of the upper Danube not far from Sigmaringen, excavations carried out in 1887 near the St. Gallus church brought to light two Alamannic row graves from the late 7th century, whose grave goods an aristocratic background. Unfortunately, the two graves were destroyed after their discovery.⁵⁸ Some of the grave goods escaped destruction and were scattered in the surrounding area. Some of the finds, including the fragment of a long sword with a silver scabbard (see Fig. 7)⁵⁹, later came into the hands of the Hohenzollern building councillor Eduard Eulenstein. After Eulenstein's death, the sword scabbard from Gutenstein came to the Museum of Pre- and Early History in Berlin.⁶⁰ The valuable exhibit was confiscated by the Red Army in 1945 and was subsequently considered lost. In 2007, the sword sheath reappeared in public as part of the *Merovingian period - Europe without borders* exhibition. It still kept in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow today.⁶¹ Replicas can be seen in the Roman-Germanic Central Museum in Mainz and the Württemberg State Museum in Stuttgart.

The sword scabbard consists of a 27 cm long, thin sheet of silver that is with bronze edge fittings and horizontal stripes on a wooden base. The transverse bronze bands divide the ornamentation of the embossed silver plate into three fields.

The uppermost field shows a warrior dressed in a sleeveless robe. This garment is reminiscent of a thick pelt whose tail has not been cut off - a detail it has in common with the furs of the animal warriors of Torslunda.⁶²

58 Cf. Garscha 1939; Garscha 1970, p. 82 f. and plate 31. Among the older works, Naue 1889; Lindenschmit 1900, plate 29; Wagner 1911, p. 44; Lindqvist 1925, p. 203 f. are particularly noteworthy (cf. also the literature cited in Garscha 1970, p. 83).

59 Both parts are 35 cm long (the scabbard is 27 cm long and 7.5 cm wide).

60 With the inventory number IIc 2830/31.

61 With the inventory number Aar 641, see Menghin 2007; Steuer 2008.

62 Garscha 1939, p. 3, who mentions "an animal-tail-like quiver filled with arrows" (cf. also Menghin 2007), confuses the depiction of the rear part of the garment made of "fur or fur-like, coarsely woven fabric" with the depiction of arrowheads. However, Garscha rightly rejects the earlier interpretation of this detail as a short sword or scramasax. Oehrl 2017, p. 16 points out that a wolf's rod, which can be distinguished from the clothing of the "barbed spear



Fig. 7: Sword scabbard from Gutenstein. Alamannic art, 7th century, silver and bronze (photograph from Garscha 1939, p. 1).

The figure's lowered head is hidden under a wolf mask.⁶³ The man facing right holds a spear pointed at the ground in his right hand. In his left hand, in an offering gesture, he holds a sword of

and sword-armed" wolf warrior hangs down, clearly recognizable on the pressed sheet metal model of Fen Drayton.

⁶³ Garscha 1970, p. 83 describes this figure as a "warrior with a boar's head in scale armor" - an interpretation that could be justified on the basis of the relationship between the animal warrior from Gutenstein and the masked warriors depicted on the Obrigheim press plate and Stanze D from Torslunda.

'wolf warriors' (cf. Quast 2001, p. 437 f.) (cf. also the pressed-plate model of Fen Drayton, Cambridgeshire, 7th century).

The blade is in its scabbard, strap unfastened, point downwards. The pommel of this weapon is decorated with a large ring; the scabbard is adorned with a pearl-shaped pendant. Ring swords have survived "as gifts in the burials of high-ranking warriors" from the Merovingian and Vendel periods - both on the continent and in southern England, Sweden and Finland - and are described academic literature as "signs of a partnership of warriors . . . in the sense of a brotherhood of swearers or a relationship of allegiance".⁶⁴ The custom of precious sword pendants, which is also archaeologically documented in the Germanic cultural areas of this period, is usually attributed a magical amulet function.⁶⁵

At the feet of the animal warrior is a fragment of a cross-like animal vortex, which is repeated in full form in the lower part of the panel. Wolfgang Müller has interpreted this cross, whose arms end in animal heads - of birds or snakes - as a Christian symbol. The simultaneous appearance of this symbol with the animal warrior could well stand for a religious syncretism, which would be understandable for a time in which the conversion of the Alamanni was not yet complete.⁶⁶ However, this cross can also be interpreted as a swastika - a symbol that was frequently used in the Germanic iconography of the Migration Period and the Merovingian period.

On the right side of the lower cross, perpendicular to the axis of the sword, the feet of a second animal warrior can be pointing to the left, his shirt also ending in an animal tail.

The central part of the sword scabbard from Gutenstein is traversed by a long, vertical silver band decorated with gilt bronze beads. On each side of the band there are three zoomorphic motifs possibly representing dragons or worm-like animals,⁶⁷ facing each other in pairs.

The artist obviously used more or less symmetrical matrices to create the ornamentation on the silver plate. Both the incomplete use of the stamped motifs and the different orientation of the two animal warriors in the upper and lower part of the scabbard a disjointed division of the decorative elements. The

⁶⁴ See Steuer 2003a, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Cf. Werner 1956; Raddatz 1957; Paulsen 1967, p. 92 f.; Arends 1978; Quast 2002; Steuer 1993; Steuer 2004.

⁶⁶ Müller 1986, p. 72: ". . . the scabbard . . . from Gutenstein near Sigmaringen . . . shows, as usual, a wolf warrior at the top and now also the cross in the lowest part, clear evidence of the prevailing syncretism." Cf. also Müller 1974, p. 176; Stein 1967, p. 140 f. also assumes syncretism (in the same work; cf. also the description of other objects found in Gutenstein, p. 269 f.).

⁶⁷ Cf. the analysis by Garscha 1939, pp. 3 and 7.

The sword scabbard to which this plate is attached does not appear to have been the original carrier. In all probability, the silver plate was originally used to decorate another object before it was "cut up and reworked for the spade scabbard".⁶⁸ If the sword scabbard probably dates to the late 7th century, the plate was possibly made several decades earlier (perhaps around 600).

The repeated use of a decorative element is a common practice, as evidenced by a small, rectangular bronze fragment from Obrigheim, which was attached to the inside of a maple wood bowl together with other fragmented strips of gilded bronze and fastened with bronze nails - which probably does not correspond to its original function.⁶⁹ The iconography of this pressed plate, which was discovered in 1884 in a large Merovingian cemetery in the Palatinate⁽⁷⁰⁾ is closely related to the symbolism of the sword scabbard from Gutenstein. The two almost contemporary⁷¹ objects belong to the Alamannic area.

The small fragment from Obrigheim depicts a wolf warrior in a pose identical to that of the animal warrior from Gutenstein (see Fig. 8). The anthropomorphic figure with a canid-like head holds a sword in its left hand⁷² and a downward-pointing lance in its right hand. To her right is a second figure whose horned headdress⁷³ and "leaping" gait are strongly reminiscent of the "weapon dancer" of Torslunda (matrix D).

In his right hand, the weapon dancer holds two lances crossed over each other, while in his left hand, in front of the body of the wolf-like figure, is another lance pointing downwards. This motif, which is associated with the wearing of horned helmets, is found in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian art of the Merovingian period (cf. the decoration on the helmets of Sutton

68 Cf. Menghin / Bertram 2007.

69 Cf. especially Polenz 1988, pp. 313-355, plates 111-143; Engels 2002, pp. 515 f.

70 The pressed plate was found in grave 139 and is now kept in the Historical Museum Palatinate. However, Obrigheim near Bad Dürkheim should not be confused with its close cousin in Baden, where a Merovingian cemetery was also found (cf. Engels 2002).

71 Around the middle of the 7th century for the Obrigheim press plate; cf. Engels 2002, p. 516.

72 According to Hauck, it is a ring sword (cf. the drawing by I. Müller in Hauck 1957b, pl. III, Fig. 4; however, a ring is barely recognizable in the infrared photograph, plate II, fig. 3b). The detail does not appear on the sketch by H. Ribbeck, which was made on the basis of the cast preserved in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum Mainz (cf. Böhner 1991, p. 717, fig. 29). The earlier, too cursory sketches made by Sjöberg 1905, p. 324, fig. 4 and Oxenstierna 1956, p. 169 cannot be taken into consideration. The original plate was examined again under a microscope by the author in Speyer. No traces of a ring could be found on the pommel of the sword.

73 This detail almost disappears in the sketch published by Böhner in 1991.



Fig. 8: Fragment from Obrigheim (Photograph: Lars Börner, Historisches Museum Pfalz in Speyer).

Hoo and Valsgårde VII) and the Viking Age (remains of the tapestry from Oseberg, figure of Ekhammar) several times⁽⁷⁴⁾.

The "dancer" from Obrigheim is possibly accompanied on the right by another figure, which Karl Hauck interpreted in a 1957 study as the image of a second wolf warrior (see Fig. 9).⁷⁵ However, this detail is not clearly recognizable on the original fragment. Based on this meagre evidence, however, Hauck attempts to reconstruct the scene in its entirety: On the left side, a first animal warrior respectfully holds his sword and bows his head in resignation to his conqueror; the latter, in the center, performs the ritual of the weapon dance, while another masked warrior depicted on the right side of the sheet raises his head and draws his sword. According to Karl Hauck, the stance of this second supposed animal warrior is reminiscent of that of the Wolf Warrior of Torslunda (stanza D), although the two scenes differ in that only the right-hand figure of Obrigheim carries a shield.

Following his idea, Hauck also strings together the various elements of Gutenstein's sword scabbard to create a structure identical to Obrigheim (see fig. 10). This time, too, a weapon dancer stands between the two animal warriors. This theory seems very daring insofar as the dancer does not appear on the sword scabbard.

Based on traces on the upper right corner of the scabbard, however, Karl Hauck claims to be able to recognize an arm and part of a helmet that possibly belonged to a weapon dancer⁽⁷⁶⁾.

74 For a complete overview of the archaeological material, see the references cited above.

75 Cf. Hauck 1957a, p. 12.

76 Cf. the drawing by I. Müller, in Hauck 1957a, plate III, fig. 5.

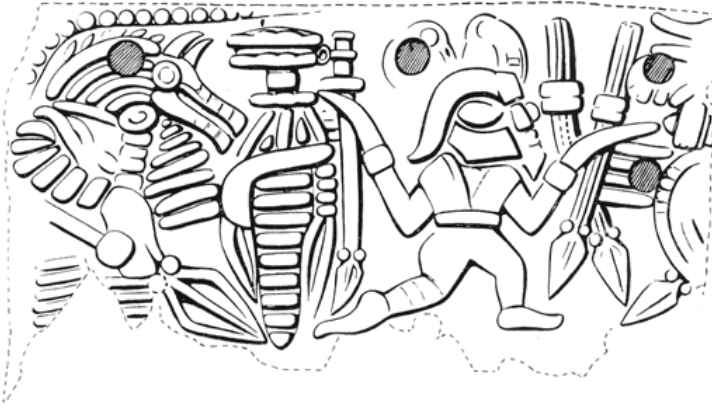


Fig. 9: Fragment from Obergheim. Drawing by I. Müller (in: Hauck 1957a, pl. II, fig. 4).

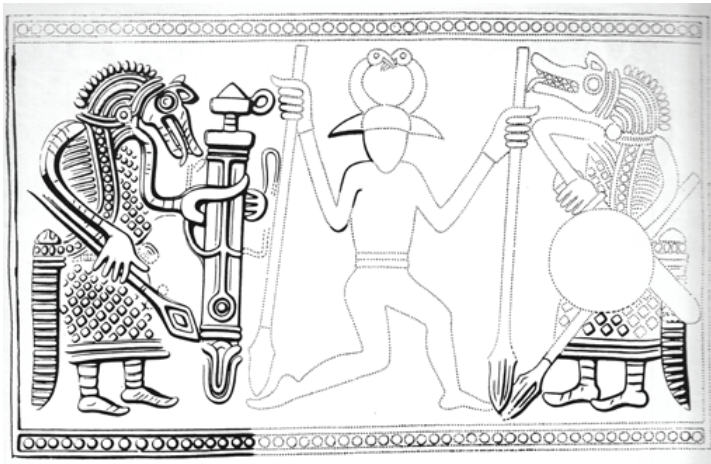


Fig. 10: Possible reconstruction of the motif, which is only partially depicted on the sword scabbard from Gutenstein, according to an interpretation by Karl Hauck (drawing by I. Müller in: Hauck 1957a pl. III, fig. 5). Inspired by the fragment from Obergheim, but also by one of the matrices from Torslunda, Karl Hauck suggested combining several fragments within the same model, which are used in the ornamentation of the sword scabbard from Gutenstein.

According to Hauck, the three figures in this scene an episode of the Hildesage: The hero Hetel/Heðinn (the first wolf warrior) succumbs to the blows of Hagen/Hǫgni (depicted as a 'weapon dancer') before he is avenged by Wate (the second wolf warrior). In this context, Hagen is to be seen as essentially related to Óðinn.⁷⁷ Since the legend of the Hildesage in the Old Norse texts is linked to the idea of the battle for the dead, which is repeated until the demise of the gods.

⁷⁷ Cf. Schröder 1958, p. 57.

(cf. an. *Hjaðningavíg*, "Kampf der Hedeninge bzw. der Leute von Heðinn"), the motif reconstructed by Hauck is supposed to correspond to the depiction of a heroic cult game.⁷⁸ However, no known version of the Hildesage - neither in the Middle High German epics (*Kudrun* and Lamprecht's *Alexander*) nor in the Scandinavian sources (*Gesta Danorum*, *Skáldskaparmál*, *Sörla þáttur*) - presents the events in the sequence postulated by Hauck. Furthermore, Wate is not mentioned at all in the Old Norse tradition of the Hildesage.⁷⁹ An etymological examination of this name also reveals no relationship to the beast warriors - in contrast to the name Heðinn.

In his later works, however, Karl Hauck abandons the connection to the Hildesage - and in return emphasizes the Odin-like character of the one-eyed "Dancer" from Torslunda, whose gesture and equipment are strongly reminiscent of the posture of the "Dancer" on the plate from Obrigheim⁽⁸⁰⁾.

In 1967, the archaeologist Peter Paulsen again studied the motif reconstructed by Hauck, but attributed a different meaning to it. According to this new interpretation, the figures depicted on the press plates from Gutenstein and Obrigheim are participants in a death ritual: the warrior wearing a wolf mask "raises the ring sword of the dead, . . . with the point downwards for the ceremonial handover" at the weapons dance before the god of death and war Wotan-Óðinn, "into whose retinue the deceased humbly joins in order to be able to fight again in the afterlife with the same weapons, his armor, which is laid before him in the grave"⁸¹ - a traditional gesture that is also depicted on the helmet of Vendel XIV (see fig. 11)⁸² and on the image stone Lärbro Tängelgårda I (Got- land)⁸³. The "consecrated man . . . is to be taken home by the consecrator" or accepted into the supernatural company of the *einherjar*.

Alice Margaret Arent⁸⁴ has presented a third interpretation of the same motif which is associated with martial initiation. This type of ceremony often involves a symbolic death that precedes rebirth through initiation.⁸⁵ The iconography of the Gutenstein and Obrigheim fragments could therefore be interpreted as follows: The first wolf warrior presents his sword with his head humbly bowed in anticipation of an apparent death ("mock death"); he then prepares for his "resurrection"

78 Cf. Hauck 1957a, p. 21 f.

79 Cf. Landolt 1999c; Landolt 2006. On the tradition and interpretation of the Hildesage, cf. also Marold 1990.

80 Hauck 1981b, p. 217 f.; Hauck 1982b, p. 331 ff.

81 Paulsen 1967, p. 142.

82 Cf. Paulsen 1967, fig. 70.

83 This image stone was erected around 700 (cf. Lindqvist 1941-1942, 1, Fig. 86).

84 Arent 1969, p. 139.

85 For a general overview of the phenomenon of initiation rites, see Eliade 1992.



Fig. 11: Detail of the helmet from Vendel Tomb XIV, a procession of warriors armed with ring swords (after Stolpe / Arne 1927, plate 42).

("reawake") in the form of the figure on the right, whose martial stance - head erect and hand on the sword pommel - represents the new status. The "Waffentänzer" in the middle illustrates the execution of the "rite de passage"⁸⁶ between these two steps: "the transition from the one to the other is indicated by the mediating sword-dance figure"⁽⁸⁷⁾.

As tempting as Paulsen's and Arent's attempts at interpretation may be, they both rely on Hauck's reconstruction, which is on the daring evaluation of barely recognizable traces in the examination of the surviving pictorial monuments. A more cautious approach seems here: Although the relationship between the pictorial elements depicted on the slabs of Obrigheim, Gutenstein and Torslunda⁸⁸ proves not only the use of common iconographic patterns, but also the influence of shared pre-Christian beliefs and rituals; however, the fact that the figures depicted on these pictorial monuments occur in different groupings in each case must be taken into account. On Stanze D from Torslunda, the attacking wolf warrior follows the weapon dancer, who strides from right to left; on the pressed sheet from Obrigheim, on the other hand, the animal warrior stands

86 This concept, which is based on van Gennep 1909, was used in Old Norse philology by the Austrian folklorist Lily Weiser-Aall, among others (cf. Weiser-Aall 1927).

87 Arent 1969, p. 139.

88 One of the first researchers to link the three objects was Sjöberg in 1905, who discussed the results of an article by Schück in 1902 and compared the motif of the wolf warrior with certain Byzantine reliefs from Asia Minor (Tusla and Hamidieh). Sjöberg's interpretation of Torslunda's matrix D is questionable, however, as he postulates that the figure with the horned helmet is fleeing from the wolf warrior. Schück, on the other hand, had interpreted the iconography of the Stanzas of Torslunda in the light of the legend of Ragnarr loðbrók, but this also unconvincing. For the sources of the story of Ragnarr loðbrók, see above all the *Gesta Danorum* IX, the *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, the *Kráku- mál* and the *Ragnarssona saga*. For further references, see McTurk 2003.

left of the weapon dancer and raises his sword in a humble posture; no weapon dancer can be seen on Gutenstein's sword scabbard. These variations make it impossible to reconstruct a single, fixed model for the three depictions - an approach that proves far too systematic to take account of the complexity of this pictorial tradition.

Heinrich Beck's apt interpretation of Stanze D by Torslunda has already been : according to it, the artist probably depicted Óðinn leading one of his animal warriors into battle.

What was the significance of the two bronze plates from the Alamannic area? The respectful posture of the animal warrior of Gutenstein, who lowers his lance and offers his sword, undoubtedly corresponds to a gesture of honor. Irrespective of Hauck's proposed reconstruction of the "complete scene" with two wolf warriors and a weapon dancer, the handing over of the sword by the masked man can very well be interpreted as a death ritual.

The display of weapons is of course directed at the god of war and the dead, Óðinn - to whom the plate from Obrigheim lends the features of a weapon dancer with a horned helmet. In the Vendelian iconography of the north, this figure embodies both a Dioscurian deity who assumes the role of a victor (as, for example, on the helmet plates of Valsgärde VII and Valsgärde VIII) and the lord of Valhalla (on Stanze D of Torslunda).

As "men Óðinn" (cf. *Ynglinga saga*, chap. VI), the beast warriors are protected by the one-eyed god in battle (cf. stanza D of Torslunda). After their death, they take their place among the *einherjar* (cf. the fragment from Obrigheim). The motif of the death of the beast warrior is represented in two forms in Alamannic art: in a "complete" form, which shows both the figure of the beast warrior and the weapon dancer (fragment from Obrigheim), and a "shortened" form, which shows both the beast warrior and the weapon dancer (fragment from Obrigheim). Form on which the "dancer" is not represented (sword scabbard from Gutenstein).

The question arises as to which form the second masked warrior, which is only partially visible on the sword scabbard from Gutenstein, belongs to. The presence of this figure on the fragment from Obrigheim remains hypothetical. There is no trace of a second wolf warrior on the Torslunda matrix. Hauck (1957a) explains this fact by the fact that the Norse tradition of the Hildesage only mentions Hogni and Heðinn, while Wate is of South Germanic origin alone. However, this interpretation is hardly convincing, as the beast warrior of Torslunda shows the same aggressive attitude that Hauck attributes to the figure of Wate in his reconstruction - knowing full well that the wolf warrior of Torslunda does not fight against the weapon dancer identified by Hauck as Hagen, but follows him.

However, Hauck and Paulsen rightly emphasize the significance of a revealing detail on the sword scabbard from Gutenstein: the wolf warrior is equipped with a ring sword. Hauck believes that he can recognize a similar sword on the bronze fragment from Obrigheim and on the weapon dancer from Torslunda, but this is not certain.

3 The ring swords and the Germanic followers

Ring swords are also depicted on the C punch of Torslunda,⁸⁹ on the helmet of Valsgärde VII⁹⁰ and on the helmet of Vendel XIV^{91, (92)}

Ring swords owe their name to the (solid or hollow) gold, silver or bronze rings attached to one end of the pommel⁽⁹³⁾. These are often weapons of outstanding quality, which usually appear as grave goods in burials of high-ranking warriors in the Frankish, Alemannic, Lombard, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultural areas (including the burial grounds of Vendel and Valsgärde, from where the above-mentioned depictions originate)⁽⁹⁴⁾.

Where does this tradition come from? What symbolic function does the carrying of ring swords refer to? Since the end of the 19th century, various interpretations of the meaning of these weapons have been considered: a practical function (fastening a loop or a counterweight when striking), decoration, magical amulet, symbol of brotherhood in arms, sign of rank or distinction for high-ranking members of an entourage.⁹⁵ The latter theory is the focus of an important study by Heiko Steuer, which was published in 1987 in *Studien zur Sachsenforschung*. According to Steuer, the ring custom originated in the Frankish royal courts of northern France around 500 and subsequently adopted in Kent and Scandinavia in the course of the 6th century.⁹⁶ However, it should be borne in mind that the Swedish swords of Väsby and Sturkö, as well as the English swords of Kent, are about the same age

89 This die-cut shows two warriors part in a procession; the first of them is carrying a ring sword.

90 Arwidsson 1977, p. 119, figs. 129-134. The motifs on the helmet include the image of a horseman whose helmet is decorated with a boar. This rider carries a ring sword and holds a lance in his hand, which is wielded by a weapon dancer with a horned helmet.

91 Stolpe / Arne 1912, plate 41 f. The right side of the helmet depicts a procession of warriors (possibly funeral processions) whose participants are holding ring swords in front of them as a sign of homage (cf. Steuer 1987, p. 203 f.). These warriors wear helmets with bird heads. The compound *arhjálmr*, which denotes the helmet of King *Hákon* in the *Hákonarmál*, perhaps to an old eagle symbolism, which also occurs in the Vendel Age helmet decorations (cf. Dillmann 2002).

92 On the pressed plates with depictions of ring swords, see Steuer 1987, pp. 204 and 231 f.

93 Exceptionally also on the crossguard as on the Norwegian ring sword from Snartemo (cf. Evison 1967, no. 37).

94 Cf. Steuer 1987 on the geographical distribution of the findings (p. 209) and list of earlier literature (pp. 232-234). See also Montelius 1924; Behmer 1939, p. 126 f.; Evison 1967 and 1975; Menghin 1983, p. 64 f. and 142 f.; Steuer 2003a; Fischer 2008; Grünzweig 2009; Möllenberg 2011, p. 73 f.

95 These theories were summarized by Böhner 1949, p. 167 f.

96 Steuer 1987, p. 217 ff. and 227.

like the oldest continental models (such as the Merovingian *spatha* of Krefeld-Gellep, Rhineland, c. 520-530)⁽⁹⁷⁾.

This custom - which was practiced both in the pagan North and in the Christian⁹⁸ - denies any religious significance to the tax⁽⁹⁹⁾ This point of view will be discussed in more detail later in this study.

The manufacture of ring swords ended on the continent in the early 7th century, but continued in the Nordic world - especially in Finland - until the late 7th century.¹⁰⁰ According to Steuer, the ring swords were probably made on the orders of the king or lord of the court in a small number of "central workshops located at royal courts". In this context, he mentions Helgö in particular for the Swedish region⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

However, several individual rings that were not attached to swords have been found in various areas of the Nordic world (Funen, southern Norway, Uppland and Södermanland, Gotland, Finland).¹⁰² Steuer points out, however, that the pair of rings and the sword usually do not belong together "from the outset": In some cases they come from different workshops or regions. Pairs of rings could also be attached to the pommel of a much older sword.¹⁰³ In the case of the oldest weapons in particular, the original ornamentation of the weapon was hardly taken into account.¹⁰⁴ Some rings were also removed again after some time⁽¹⁰⁵⁾.

The method of attaching the rings is not standardized. On the oldest swords (from the 6th century), one ring piece is fixed vertically to the sword pommel, while the second ring is hung horizontally and remains movable. In other cases, the interlocking rings are no longer movable (6th to 7th century) and are fused together or cast together. On some Finnish swords dating from the late 7th or early 8th century, the rings and pommel were cast together⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

97 For the swords from Väsby and Sturkö, see Evison 1967, nos. 42 and 43. The weapons from Kent are also included in this study (the sword from Petersfinger, Wiltshire, is one of the oldest ring swords). For the grave at Krefeld-Gellep, see Pirling 1964, pp. 188-216.

98 See above all the sword of Chaouilley (Meurthe and Moselle), whose hilt is decorated with a cross. is decorated (cf. Evison 1967, no. 21).

99 Steuer 1987, p. 220: "Ring swords occur in the same way in both Christian and pagan milieus. Their significance is therefore independent of the cultic-religious background".

100 Tax 1987, p. 208.

101 Tax 1987, p. 214.

102 Steuer 1987, p. 212 (Map 11) and p. 235.

103 Tax 1987, p. 216 f.

104 Tax 1987, p. 211.

105 Tax 1987, p. 210, 234 f.

106 Cf. the typology of Steuer 1987, pp. 208-211.

Several ring swords have been found in aristocratic graves (e.g. in Sweden);¹⁰⁷ others were probably carried by warriors of lower rank who had nevertheless been honored by their lord by being given this weapon.¹⁰⁸ In view of their quality and their (relatively) rare occurrence¹⁰⁹, these swords certainly represent signs of distinction or reward: Such ostentatious armament proved the owner's elevated position in society, especially in the context of a warrior's retinue.

Several centuries after the Vendel period, Old Norse literature still remembers this custom. In the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, Str. 9, the Valkyrie Sváva describes the sword she gives to the hero Helgi with the following words: *Hringr er í hjalti, hugr er í miðio, ógn er í oddi, þeim er eigna getr* ("A ring is on the hilt, / courage is in the middle, / terror in the tip, / for the one who possesses it;").¹¹⁰ In Skaldic poetry, the noun *hringr* can also denote the sword as a *pars pro toto*.¹¹¹ The Old English corpus also contains several references to ring swords, such as the word *hring-mæl* ("ring- adorned"),¹¹² which occurs three times in *Beowulf*.¹¹³

In addition, several skaldic metaphors refer to the theme of the generous ruler who generously distributes (or 'breaks') the rings (cf. the terms *hringdríf i*,¹¹⁴ *hringhreytandi*,¹¹⁵ *hringmildr*,¹¹⁶ *hringskati*,¹¹⁷ *hringbrjótr*,¹¹⁸ *hringskemmir*¹¹⁹ etc.). This custom is of course not limited to ring swords.

107 Steuer 1987, p. 226: "Among the highest-ranking are warriors like those . . . in Vendel, graves XI and I, and Valsgårde, graves 8 and 7 . . . were buried."

108 This is the case at Schretzheim (cf. Klingenberg / Koch 1974) or Kösching (Dannheimer 1974).

109 Of the 100 swords found in the Merovingian cemetery of Schretzheim, 83 date to the period 525-630 (this corresponds to the period of the ring swords found on the continent). Only one of these weapons, found in grave 93, is decorated with a ring (cf. Steuer 1987, p. 206 f. and fig. 8).

110 Krause (transl.) 2004, p. 267. The neuter *hjalt* can also denote the crossguard.

111 Cf. *Sverða heiti: Pulur IV, I* (*Skj.* A:1, p. 664, B:1, p. 664); Falk 1914, pp. 27 f., 52 and 57; Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 282.

112 Cf. the definition in Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, I, p. 561 f.: "ornamented with inlaid ring [of a sword]". On the armament terminology in *Beowulf*, cf. e.g. Stjerna 1912; Brady 1979.

113 In v. 1521, 1564 and 2037.

114 *Atlakviða*, Str. 31; Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 281.

115 *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Jón Sigurðsson / Sveinbjörn Egilsson (ed./trans.) 1848-1852, 2nd ed, p. 407; Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 282).

116 *Háttatal*, Str. 47 (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 236); cf. also Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 282.

117 Sturla, *Hákonarkviða*, Str. 34 (*Skj.* A:2, p. 117, B:2, p. 125); Finnur Jónsson 1931, S. 283.

118 Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Höfuðlausn*, Str. 17 (*Skj.* A:1, p. 38, B:1, p. 33); Finnur Jónsson 1931, S. 281.

119 *Háttatal*, Str. 47 (Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 283).

Here too, similar ideas can be found in Old English poetry. The author of *Beowulf* describes the hall of the (Danish) king Hrothgar as *hring-sele* (v. 2010): "a hall in which rings are distributed".⁽¹²⁰⁾ The distribution of rings, a custom deeply rooted in the Germanic aristocracy, contributes to the ruler's prestige. Through this gesture, the leader of the retinue (lat. *comitatus*, germ. **druhtiz*, an. *drótt*)¹²¹ shows his favor to the best warriors; he secures the loyalty of the elite warriors and at the same time establishes the rank and honor within the group of companions.¹²² As Sollveig Möllendorf shows, "in the Old English heroic epic of *Beowulf*, from the 8th century, . . . there is also talk of swords with ring marks and ringed swords in several places".¹²³

The investigation of this tradition raises several questions. According to Heiko Steuer, the distribution of ring swords was a royal prerogative among the Franks. Was this also the case among other peoples? If the wearing of the ring in the Merovingian world was a symbol of subordination to the giver, did this custom have the same meaning everywhere? Could it not have been based on a network of mutual obligations in the form of a "brotherhood in arms"?

For Heiko Steuer, the possession of a ring sword expresses the affiliation of the ruler's entourage: "The bearers of the ring swords are the highest-ranking warriors of the king's retinue."¹²⁴ It is doubtful whether this idea of the symbolic value of the ring swords, which goes back to the model of the *trustis dominica* of the Frankish kings, can be easily transferred to the context of other Germanic, still pagan cultures.

Depending on the time and place, the "Germanic" following¹²⁵ probably took on different forms, each relating to a particular social background. In his *Germania*, Tacitus gives the leader

120 Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, 1, p. 562.

121 The use of the term *drótt* ("warrior's retinue") is documented in the oldest Skaldic poetry (cf. above all a stanza of Bragi enn gamli, written in the first half of the 9th century: *Ragnarsdrápa*, str. 3, in *Skj.* A:1, S. 1, B:1, S. 1). On the question of the Germanic vocabulary associated with the system described by Tacitus under the term *comitatus*, see above all Kuhn 1956; Lindow 1976; Landolt 1998, pp. 533-537.

"Gefolgschaft" has only been known in German since the 19th century.

122 Tacitus (*Germania*, XIII) already testifies that there were differences in rank within the *comitatus*: *Gradus quin etiam ipse comitatus habet, inducio ejus quem sectantur*. ("Yes, within the community there are even ranks, according to the determination of whom one joins.") (Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 23).

123 Möllenberg 2011, p. 91.

124 Tax 1987, p. 225.

125 It is worth recalling the "classic" definition by Kuhn 1956 (p. 12): "An association of consistently free men in the permanent, but usually not lifelong service of a more powerful person, belonging to his household and intended only for military service and representation, in a respected position in a mutual relationship of loyalty to their prince".

of the *comitatus* the title *princeps*,¹²⁶ although his function does not necessarily to that of the *rex*.¹²⁷ And as late as the 11th century, a person as influential as the Norwegian Þórir hundr surrounded himself with a group of companions,¹²⁸ without therefore being a member of a royal family.

The exercise of power different forms in the ancient north. A few influential dynasties who attempted to bring more or less large areas under their rule very early on; however, their ambitions met with resistance from many regional leaders who zealously guarded their independence. In this fragmented political space, even the least petty king surrounded himself with a group of loyalists who could come from different regions and different social classes.¹²⁹ In order to strengthen his argument, however, Steuer refers to the Merovingian model and transfers it to Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian society: "The *trustis do- minica* was a royal retinue, whereby the lord of the retinue could have been the Frankish king of a kingdom, the king in the first Kentish kingdom or even the king of the Svear in Uppsala."¹³⁰ But can this model of retinue be adopted for the entire Germanic world without modification? The structures of Frankish allegiance begin to develop at the beginning of the 6th century, in a completely different context from the environment in which the ancient *comitatus* rooted, defined by the beliefs and clan-like organization of pre-Christian society. At the beginning of the Migration Period, the Germanic *princeps* maintains the loyalty of his entourage through his generosity (horses, weapons, feasting, booty).¹³¹ Four centuries later, the Merovingian king promises his entourage legal protection, which is expressed by the tripling of the value money, in exchange for an oath of loyalty,

126 *Germania*, XIII.

127 Cf. in another context the expression *rex vel princeps* (*Germania*, X).

128 *Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr), p. 486: Þórir hundr kom þá ok gekk fram með sveit sína fyrir merkit.

129 This situation roughly corresponds to the picture by Tacitus: The *comitatus* unites young men of noble descent who are to receive their training among experienced, courageous warriors who are, however, of inferior descent (*Germania*, XIII): *Insignis nobilitas aut magna patrum merita principis dignationem etiam adulescentulis assignant; ceteris robustioribus ac iam pridem probatis adgregantur, nec rubor inter comites adspici*. ("High descent or great services of the fathers also give very young people the favor of a suitor; they are added to the others who are already stronger and have long since acquired. It is also no disgrace to appear among the retainers.") (Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 21 f.).

130 Tax 1987, p. 225.

131 *Germania*, XIV to the *comitatus*: *exigunt enim principes sui liberalitate illum bellatorem equum, illam cruentam uictricemque frameam; nam epulae et quamquam incompti, largi tamen apparatus pro stipendio cedunt; materia munificentiae per bella et raptus*. ("For the followers expect from the favor of their lord their war-horse, their bloody and victorious frame. For the meals and the feasts, even if simple, are regarded as pay. The means for this expenditure are provided by wars and robbery.") (Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 23).

which binds the warrior to his service. This oath bears all the signs of an act of submission.¹³² However, the *trustis dominica*, the legacy of a long tradition of allegiance, deviates from the original form of the *comitatus*: it still possesses the most important characteristics of an allegiance, but is based on a clearer dominance of the function of the king. Reinhard Wenskus writes that the Frankish *trustis* developed "under the conditions of a constitution with a stronger emphasis on lordship"¹³³. Steuer, who is convinced of the Frankish origin of the ring swords, logically regards the carrying of this type of weapon as a sign of submission: "The sword rings express . . . express a bond between warrior and lord, but in the form of dependence. Admission into the royal entourage *trustis dominica* is an act of submission."¹³⁴ For the Scandinavian world in the 6th and 7th centuries, this assertion must be further differentiated.

Certainly the Swedish graves of this period show an undeniable influence of Frankish culture, as Arrhenius also describes: "local goldsmiths' production in sixth-century central Sweden adopted all the status symbols of the Franks, including the weapons and horse trappings, whose rich decorations included garnet cloisonné, such as those found in the earliest boat graves from Vendel and Valsgärde."¹³⁵ This illustrates the interest of the Uppland aristocracy in the way of life at the Merovingian court.¹³⁶ We also know of the enthusiasm that English or Frankish weapons aroused in the old north up to the Viking Age.¹³⁷ This exchange could also have contributed to the further spread of the fashion for ring swords from a continental center. This is at least the thesis of Heiko Steuer.

132 This is certainly the meaning of the gesture of the future follower who takes his oath with his weapons in the hands of the ruler (cf. one of the *Formulae Markulf* (Zeumer (ed.) 1886, p. 55): *Et quia illi fidelis, Deo propitio, noster veniens ibi in palatio nostro una cum arma sua in manu nostra trustem et fidelitatem nobis visus est coniurasse: propterea per presen- tem preceptum decernemus ac iubemus, ut deinceps memoratus ille inter numero antruscionorum computetur*). Karl Hauck (1957, p. 19, note 40) and Heiko Steuer 1987, p. 223 draw a parallel with the oath that members of the *hirð* had to take in Norway in the 13th century (*Hirðskrá*,

§ 31, p. 422 f.; German translation Meissner 1938, p. 38 f.). However, the text contains an oath to the Holy Scriptures: It is separated by several centuries from the customs of pagan Scandinavia, which were probably very different.

133 Kuhn / Wenskus 1973. Schulze 1985, 1, p. 49: "The right to own a retinue was obviously restricted to members of the royal house in the Merovingian period".

134 Tax 1987, p. 226.

135 Arrhenius 1985, p. 197.

136 Arrhenius 1985: "These finds must be regarded as indications of contacts and diplomacy between the Franks and the Svear at a royal level, rather than of trading links".

137 Cf. above all the reference to "Welsh" weapons in Str. 8 of the *Haraldskvæði*. In the Carolingian period, the Edict of Pitres 864 prohibited the export of arms to Scandinavia: *Edictum Pistense*, ch. XXV, p. 321; cf. Falk 1914, pp. 38-41.

However, this statement should not ignore the special features that distinguish Nordic society from the Christian world. These include, in particular, the archaic social structures, which are closely linked to pre-Christian traditions and ideas.

The organization of allegiance in the Scandinavian world differs markedly from the practices of the continental elites - at least until the turn of the millennium, a time when the strengthening of royal power and the advance of Christianity brought about profound changes in Scandinavian society⁽¹³⁸⁾.

Even at the end of the 10th century, relations between the leader and his companions were by no means limited to purely hierarchical relationships. One of the three runic inscriptions from Hällestad (DR 295)¹³⁹ bears witness to this:

:askil:sati:stin:þansi:ift[iR]||:tuka:kurms:sun:saR:hulan:|trutin:saR flu:aigi:at:ub|:salum
||satu:trikaR:iftiR:sin:bruþr|stin:ā:biarki:stuþan:runum:þiR:||: (kurms:tuka):kiku:(nist)
[iR]¹⁴⁰

(Eskill placed this stone after Toki, his favored master. He did not flee at Uppsala. The men placed the stone on the mountain after their brother, supported by runes. They went closest to Gorm's Toki.)¹⁴¹

Toki is probably the son of the Danish king Gormr inn gamli. He is therefore an important personage who served as a leader (trutin, an. *dróttin*,

138 During this time, following in Scandinavia experienced an upswing, which mainly caused by the influence of Anglo-Saxon models. One of the most frequently used terms, the Old Norse *hirð*, probably comes from the Old English *hired*. On this question, see above all Kuhn 1956. However, some of the conclusions he proposes seem particularly radical: according to Kuhn, in the absence of the necessary social structures, following did not appear in the north before the end of the 10th century. This argument is not convincing, as the material conditions to maintain an armed retinue (the emergence of a powerful and wealthy aristocracy and the regular conduct of military campaigns) already in the ancient North before the turn of the millennium. Kuhn also insists on the lack of a common terminology in the various branches of the Germanic world and restricts the occurrence of followers to two epochs (the continental Germanic Roman imperial period and Scandinavia at the end of the Viking Age). The study by John Lindow in 1976 makes it possible to reject this hypercritical approach. is an extensive literature on the institution of "Germanic" allegiance: cf. von Kienle 1939; Naumann 1939; Wenskus 1961, p. 346 f. and 1992; Schlesinger 1963; Price

1968, 1974 and 1994; Kristensen 1983; Schulze 1985; Bazelmans 1991 and 1999; Steuer 1992 and 2003b; Wenskus 1992; Harris 1993; Nørgård Jørgensen 1996; Evans 1997.

139 Hällestad is located in Skåne, 20 km east of Lund. The three rune stones DR 295, 296 and 297, which were later integrated into the church wall, were originally erected as a memorial to Toki Gormsson by his followers.

140 Transliteration according to Jacobsen / Moltke 1942. The double lines stand for the different sides of the stone.

141 Translation Wulf 2003, p. 973.

"lord") of a retinue (an. *drótt*). Young warriors (trikaR, an. *drengir*), probably the members of his entourage,¹⁴² erected a memorial to his memory. They refer to Toki as their "brother" (brúþr, an. *bróðir*). As Geo Widengren¹⁴³ emphasizes, the lord of the followers "assumes the same position towards his followers that we can assume of the leader of the men's league. But he is not only master to them, but also comrade, friend, even brother." Widengren also quotes Richard von Kienle's commentary on this runic inscription: "It is precisely this custom of extending the term brother to the leader of the retinue that shows the close bond between follower and follower's lord, which, according to the sources, outlasts the period of active service and represents a bond for life . . . just as, on the other hand, the lord is indissolubly bound to the man and, according to Norse tradition, calls him *vinr*, *aldavinr*, 'friend', 'friend of the heart'."¹⁴⁴ The reciprocity of the bond that exists between the members of the warrior's retinue and their leader is thus clearly demonstrated by the South Swedish inscription DR 295.¹⁴⁵ This form of allegiance remains relatively close to the norms that prevailed a few centuries earlier in Vendelian Sweden.

Therefore, the symbol of the ring sword must have had a special meaning in the context of the old Norse pre-Christian allegiance, which is very different from the symbol of dependence or submission that this magnificent weapon in the context of the Frankish *trustis*, according to Steuer. In the north, the ring was probably more an expression of mutual loyalty.

According to Heiko Steuer, carrying a ring sword is not compatible with the status of leader of a retinue: "The leader of royal rank does not carry a ring sword, but his retinue of warriors of different ranks does.

142 On the Old Norse *drengr*, cf. e.g. Kuhn 1944, p. 112 f.

143 Widengren 1969, p. 53.

144 Cf. von Kienle 1938, p. 288.

145 On the inscription DR 295 see, among others, Ruprecht 1958, no. 26; Musset 1965, p. 428 f.; Jansson 1987, pp. 85- 87; von Kienle 1938, p. 288; Widengren 1969, p. 53 f. Whether the battle at Uppsala, which is mentioned here, is to be equated with the famous battle on Fýrisvellir remains open. On this battlefield, the Vikings of Jomsburg, led by Syrbjörn inn sterki, were defeated by his uncle, King Erikr inn sigrsæli of Sweden, around 980. This clash is described in several sources, including *the Gesta Danorum* (X, ii), the *Styrbjarnar þáttir Sviakappa*, the *Heiðreks saga* (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 511), the *Knýtlinga saga* (af Petersens / Emil Olson (ed.) 1919/ 1925, p. 30), the *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (ed.) 1935), p. 80 f. and in a verse by the skald Þórvaldr Hjaltason (*Skj.* A:1, p. 117, B:1, p. 111). The runic inscriptions from Högby (Ög 81 in Östergötland) and from Sjörup (DR 279 in Skåne) probably refer to the same event.

origin."¹⁴⁶He emphasizes that none of the numerous ring swords to date come from a princely tomb. Does this constitute conclusive evidence?

The warriors of Vendel and Valsgärde did not include *regalia*¹⁴⁷ in their graves comparable to those of Sutton Hoo.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Nevertheless, the abundance of grave goods points to respected leaders descended from important families: These members of an Uppland elite probably possessed their own followers.¹⁴⁹ The weapons laid in their burial mounds possibly attest to the close connection between the powerful leaders and the *drengir* of their followers. However, the affiliation of the warriors buried in the tombs of Vendel and Valsgärde to the followers of the king of the Svear cannot be proven. The status of these warriors and their connection to the royal dynasty of Uppsala is still hotly debated today.¹⁵⁰ According to Birgit Arrhenius, the graves of Vendel and Valsgärde probably belong to leading members of the royal dynasty of the Ynglingar ("these graves might belong to ruling members of the Yngling dynasty"); she regards these graves as the results of sacrificial rituals ("I underlined the possibility that these graves were sacrifices rather than graves").¹⁵¹

The carrying of a ring sword, a tradition that began in the 6th century enthusiastically received in the Scandinavian following, takes on a special connotation in this context, namely that of the notion of mutual loyalty.¹⁵² This aspect does not exclude the recognition of authority.

146 Steuer 1987, p. 226. However, a ring can be found on the shield of Sutton Hoo (Bruce-Mitford / Bimson (eds.) 1978, pp. 129-137: "The gilt-bronze ring from the shield"). Steuer interprets this piece of jewelry in the context of a princely tomb as a gift to the ruler by one of his loyal followers, or as an ancient sign of submission to a higher-ranking person (Steuer 1987, p. 213). Also worth mentioning is a ring that was attached to a drinking horn from one of the Valsgärde graves (Arwidsson 1977, p. 66 f.).

147 On the absence of royal symbols in the tombs of Vendel and Valsgärde, see Ambrosiani 1983.

148 On the royal regalia in the ship burial at Sutton Hoo, see Bruce-Mitford / Bimson (eds.) 1978.

149 In contrast, Steuer 1987, p. 213, who refers to the occurrence of two swords in each tomb, only one of which bears a ring: "one could . . . speculate that the different weapons were intended to demonstrate dependence in a following on the one hand and independence in the same way on the other". This "speculation" is difficult to verify.

150 Cf. e.g. Norr 2008; Arrhenius 2002; Wamers 2018.

151 Arrhenius 2002, p. 48.

152 The definition of rings as a sign of submission raises another objection that also applies to the Merovingian tradition: all members of the retinue receive the king's protection in exchange for their loyalty, but only the elite wear ring swords! How can it be that wearing a symbol of dependence and submission is seen as a means of distinction reserved for the most important members of the retinue? The ideas of honor and duty are certainly not incompatible (*Germania*, XII: *nec rubor inter comites adspici*). The ring therefore stands for a kind of personal bond whose nature is not limited to hierarchical relationships. In a society that has only been Christianized for a few decades

the leader with whom there is a connection, which at best can be seen as a kind of "dépendance honorable" ("honorable dependence").¹⁵³ Both principles are inseparable from the function of allegiance. However, the importance of the values varies from culture to culture according to the political circumstances in which the allegiance develops. For Frankish society, the duty of loyalty is more important, while in the Nordic world the emphasis on brotherhood in arms. These 'social' conditions also include a numinous dimension in pagan societies.¹⁵⁴ As Wilhelm Grönbech emphasizes with regard to the idea of the 'victory sword' among the Germanic tribes, the weapon 'in order to be useful had to have salvation in it'.¹⁵⁵ This is also implied by the speech given by Sváva in the *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*. The ring on the sword pommel described by the Valkyrie is not merely a sign of prestige; it is primarily intended to enhance the powers of the weapon promised to Helgi.

In the ancient north, the ring is often associated with the cult of Óðinn.¹⁵⁶ Amulet rings were found on Helgö,⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ whose function can be interpreted in this context. In addition to these objects, other religious symbols were found there - Thor's hammers and small sickles, which are reminiscent of the cult of Freyr.¹⁵⁸

this tradition probably reminded the Frankish warriors at the beginning of the 6th century of much older ideas. The Christian rulers certainly contributed to the gradual eradication of this memory, as evidenced by the cross engraved on Chaouilley's sword pommel. During a more or less long transitional phase, however, syncretic forms appeared parallel to this development (Hauck 1982b, p. 333 interprets the juxtaposition of cross and ring on the sword of Chaouilley as evidence of this phenomenon). Among the Alamanni, paganism resisted the aspirations of Christianity for much longer, and as late as the 7th century the ring sword was still closely associated with the phenomenon of the animal warrior (fragments from Obrigheim and Gutenstein). The depiction of ring swords on these iconographic testimonies is not "neutral".

153 We are using here - *mutatis mutandis* - an expression that is used in French historiography. The aim of vassalage is generally to bind the vassal to his ruler in a feudal society.

154 Cf. Pirling 1964 "The custom of attaching rings to the pommel is probably based on a magical idea that was common to all Germanic tribes at all times. This is the only explanation for the fact that ring pommel swords can be found from Italy to Scandinavia. Their rare occurrence in richly decorated graves makes it probable that only outstanding warriors and followers possessed them".

155 Cf. Grönbech 1954, 2, p. 28.

156 The god himself possesses a legendary ring called Draupnir (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, *Gylfaginning* [Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931], p. 66 f., *Skáldskaparmál*, p. 97 and 123), which he lays down on Balder's funeral pyre.

157 Hauck 1981b, plate 1, fig. 1; Andersson / Lamm 1999, p. 289; Holmqvist 1979, pp. 57, 61 f.

158 On the triad Wodan - Thor - Fricco, which is worshipped in the great temple of Uppsala, see Adams of Bremen *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, IV, 26 (Schmeidler (ed.) 1917, p. 258; Schmeidler (ed.) / Trillmich (transl.) 1978, p. 470/471).

Karl Hauck, examined the symbolic meaning of the rings on one of the drinking horns of Valsgärde and on the shield of Sutton Hoo, interprets them as a sign of connection with the deity. Hauck extends these conclusions to the weapon dancer of Torslunda, who is possibly armed with a ring sword: this figure obviously "the god himself".¹⁵⁹ Heiko Steuer takes a diametrically opposed position. He does not identify the "one-eyed dancer" with a ring sword with Óðinn: "That is why the warrior depictions on the Norse helmets and the plates of Torslunda cannot be with Óðinn either. The god himself wears not a sword with a dependency mark."¹⁶⁰

A completely different interpretation proposed here. It is very likely that in the context of pre-Christian Norse society, the ring sword not only a distinction of rank within a retinue; it is much more a sign of a personal union and connects the leader of the warrior retinue with his companions. In the context of the beliefs of this warrior elite, this symbol represents a sign of "odin" consecration - a community-building, religious experience that the lord of the retinue experiences together with his followers.¹⁶¹ This does not refer exclusively to the Norse society of the Vendel period, but can also be traced in the periphery of the Merovingian world (it must be remembered that the missionary work of the Alamanni in the 7th century was not yet complete - a period in which the Alamanni were not yet a part of the Merovingian world). The ring swords carried by the beast warriors of Gutenstein and Obrigheim show that these warriors belonged to Óðinn's mythical entourage.

The group of beast warriors represents the "earthly counterpart"¹⁶³ to the army of the deceased (*feralis exercitus*):¹⁶⁴ Their members are destined to join the *einherjar* in Valhalla after their death.

Berserkir and *úlfheðnar* prepare themselves for this fate by their leader faithfully, both in peace and in war. In battle, clad in skins, they stand on the front line. Roaring and gripped by fury, they show their 'second selves', becoming impervious to blows and behaving

159 Hauck 1982b, p. 331 ff.

160 Steuer 1987, p. 226.

161 In the Christian context of the Frankish kingdom, however, the ring no longer had any religious significance; it was primarily a sign of aristocratic status that was displayed around the ruler.

162 On the missionary work of the Alamanni, see Müller 1974, among others.

163 Cf. Dumézil 1939, p. 81, who uses the expression "doublet terrestre".

164 Cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, XLIII on the Harii.

like wild animals.¹⁶⁵ Cared for by their leaders⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ these men zealously guard their position within the entourage and occupy a place of honour in the manorial hall (an. *hǫll*).¹⁶⁷ The influence of the aristocratic way of life on the mythological representation of the afterlife must also be emphasized. Georges Du-mézil writes: ". . . l'Autre Monde et le monde terrestre sont, sur ce point, indissolublement liés: chez Odhinn, les Einherjar ne sont rien de plus et rien de moins que ce qu'ils étaient chez leur maître terrestre. Tout se passe comme si le seul fait d'avoir, sur terre, adopté cette forme d'existence leur avait assuré cette forme d'immortalité."¹⁶⁸

During certain rituals, the elite warriors seem to identify particularly closely 'companions. In this context, the Icelandic sagas make special mention of the berserkers' preference for the *jól nights*.¹⁶⁹ In this context, the wearing of masks and furs is probably with a cult of the dead.¹⁷⁰ Within a pagan society, these myths and rituals contribute particularly closely to the cohesion of the followers - just as the Christian faith an important role in the establishment of Frankish kingship. In his dissertation entitled *Krigarna i Odins sal*, Andreas Nordberg has shown the central importance of this "cultic communion" with the gods and the dead, which the Old Norse warrior elite experienced in the aristocratic hall against the background of the mythical concept of Wal-hall, for the cohesion of the followers.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ In this context, reference should again be made to the hypothesis developed by Lotte Hedeager regarding a possible "cosmological" structure of some central places of the pre-Christian Norse such as Gudme, where the division of the "cultic landscape" is reminiscent of the mythical model of Asgard (see above, Chapter VI).

Nevertheless, one should not imagine the retinue as a homogeneous social structure. Following the example of the *comitatus*, the beast warriors, like other members of Old Norse warrior retinues, came from different social classes. Some members have hardly any wealth and spend the rest of their lives as 'professional' warriors; others belong to families of

165 For all these aspects, see Chapter VII above.

166 Cf. stanzas 20 and 21 of *Haraldskvæði*.

167 In order to maintain their reputation, the berserkers do not shy from challenging their leaders' guests, especially during the nights around *jól* (see Chapter VII above). This motif appears in several Icelandic sagas, but also in the *Gesta Danorum*.

168 Dumézil 1939, p. 81.

169 see above Chapter VII.

170 Cf. among others Höfler 1934; Höfler 1973a.

171 Cf. Nordberg 2003, p. 290 f.: "De mystiska motiven med Valhall bör delvis vara gestaltade efter de religiösa upplevelserna av den kultiska kommunionen med gudarna och de döda i den aristokratiska hallen . . . In order to find the social connection to the motives of Valhall, we must change our position in the aristocratic religious order".

The ring sword, a symbol of recognition, a sign of prestige and a religious symbol belonging to an elite warrior, therefore legitimately finds its place in the hands of the animal warriors of the 7th century. The iconography of the stamps of Torslunda and the pressed plates of Obrigheim and Gutenstein thus confirms the tradition of the later literary sources: The phenomenon of animal warriors undoubtedly into the tradition of allegiance, within which the sacral function of the ruler can also be expressed.¹⁷⁴

172 See above chapter V on Kveld-Úlfr in the *Egils saga*.

173 Such a selection process has existed among Germanic followers since the Roman Iron Age: *nec solum in sua gente cuique, sed apud finitimas quoque ciuitates id nomen, ea gloria est, si numero ac uirtute comitatus emineat: expetuntur enim legationibus et muneribus ornantur* [. ...] (Germania, XIII) - "And not only in their own tribe, but also among their neighbors, he is known and famous who distinguishes himself by a numerous and valiant entourage. For he is courted by envoys and honored with gifts . . ." (Fuhrmann (ed./trans.) 2007, p. 23). This phenomenon continued into the High Middle Ages, as Heiko Steuer has noted in connection with the *trustis dominica* (Steuer 1987, p. 226): "The members of such a following come from the immediate vicinity, but at the same time also from other distant areas of Germania." These movements certainly explain the rapid transfer of Frankish customs English or Scandinavian society. The animal warriors are also no strangers to carrying these customs from one court to another: in the *Eyrbyggja saga*, the Swedish king Erik the Victorious leaves two of his berserkers to the Ladejarl Hákon Sigurðarson towards the end of the 10th century. These eventually leave Norway against their will and travel to Iceland, where their merits are not recognized (see Chapter VII above).

174 The connection to the sacred dimension of the ruler function is in line with the "odin-character of the berserkers. Óðinn is the god of kings and jarl (cf. among others the notes in Dillmann 2006, p. 263, who refers to stanza 24 of *Hárbarðljóð*: Óðinn boasts of taking in the jarle who have fallen on the battlefield, while leaving to Þórr the dead who have died in undignified circumstances). The aristocratic aspect of the Óðinn cult has been particularly by de Vries 1970, 2, pp. 48 f. and Dumézil 1977, pp. 189-195. On the other hand, many Germanic ruling dynasties also claimed divine descent (cf. Hauck 1955). Óðinn is claimed above all as the ancestor of the Ladejarle (cf. stanzas 3 and 4 of the *Há- leygjatal*). The Anglo-Saxon dynasties also refer to Woden as their common ancestor (cf. e.g. Grimm 1875-1878, 3, p. 377 f.; Hackenberg 1918; Dumville 1977; Moisl 1981; Yorke 1997). According to Jordanes (*Getica*, XIII-XIV), the Goths regarded the members of the royal family as demigods descended from Gapt - a name that corresponds to one of Óðinn epithets in the Old Norse sources (cf. Falk 1924, p. 11 f.). These mythical family trees undoubtedly testify to the idea of a privileged connection with the patron deity. In addition, the pagan world of faith links the person of the ruler with the maintenance of fertility and peace in the kingdom. A famous episode in the *Ynglinga saga* (chapter XI) tells of the murder of King Dómalði, who was sacrificed *to til árs* ("for fertility"). These traditions have inspired several researchers to postulate the existence of a "sacral kingship" among the ancient Germanic tribes. The

However, the archaeological material cannot be reduced to Merovingian and Vendel Age sources alone: The use of animal masks documented throughout the Nordic world from the Bronze Age to the Viking Age - albeit in connection with other traditions and against the backdrop of different stages of development in Scandinavian culture.

B The wearing of masks in the ancient Nordic world

1 The tradition before the Viking Age

The first depictions of masked warriors in a presumably cultic context can be found on Scandinavian Bronze Age rock paintings dating from 1500 to 500 BC¹⁷⁵ - in particular on the rock carvings from the municipality of Tanum (Bohuslän): Some figures, mostly armed with axes, appear to wear an animal head or mask on a human body.¹⁷⁶ Others wear horned helmets (interpreted by Steuer¹⁷⁷ as 'masked helmets'); most among them are armed.¹⁷⁸ Several place blowing instruments¹⁷⁹ or luren¹⁸⁰ at their mouths (see Fig. 12).

The theory of sacral kingship has triggered fierce debates - between Folke Ström 1954 and Baetke 1964, among others. Sundqvist 2002 summarized the state of research on this topic in his work *Freyr's Offspring*. Within the very extensive bibliography on this topic, see McTurk 1976; McTurk 1994; Schjødt 1990; Anton et al. 2004 (in particular the contributions by Olof Sundqvist on the Old Norse sources and by Alexandra Pesch on bracteate iconography). Höfler 1956 presented convincing arguments for the existence of a sacral kingship in the Germanic ruling families. De Vries 1970, 1, pp. 393-396 similar ideas in his Old Germanic history of religion (see also de Vries 1956 and Schlesinger 1956, pp. 139 f.).

175 Cf. within the very extensive literature Almgren 1934, Gelling / Davidson 1969; Schjødt 1986; Janson et al. (eds.) 1989; Schier 1992; Almgren et al. 1994. Masked figures can also be found on the rock carvings in Finnmark in northern Norway - including in Gåshopen and Ammtmansnes (cf. Helskog 1988; Simonsen 1958; Gunnell 1995, p. 37 f. and fig. 1-2; Helskog 2014). However, these images to the Neolithic period (around 3500 BC) and thus to a time preceding the Indo-Europeanization of the north. The scenes, which are generally referred to as depictions of "shamanistic" rituals, do not appear to have any warlike significance. Later, around 1200 BC, (female?) mask wearers and horn players with lurs can be found on the gravestones of Kivik in Skåne (cf. Randsborg 1993; Gunnell 1995, pp. 47-49 and fig. 24 f.; Randsborg 2000).

176 Cf. Baltzer 1881/1908, e.g. plates 18-21 (fig. 1) and 23 f. (fig. 1), 49 f. (fig. 8).

177 Tax 2001, p. 394.

178 Baltzer 1881/1908: with a lance, plate 31 f. (fig. 1); with an axe (or a hammer?), plates 41 (fig. 3) and 44 (fig. 2); with a shield (or a sun disk?), plate 53 f. (fig. 4). On the figures with horned helmets, see also Almgren 1934, figs. 7, 13 c, 38, 45a and 81.

179 Baltzer 1881/1908, plate 57 f. (fig. 3).

180 Cf. an. *lúðr*, "war horn", "trumpet". In modern research literature, the word refers to bronze wind instruments made between the 12th and 7th centuries BC.



Fig. 12: Petroglyphs from Kalleby, Tanum (After Almgren 1934, Fig. 7).

These motifs probably reflect the beliefs and religious rituals of the Bronze Age. However, their interpretation proves to be difficult, as the rock art predates the first written sources by several centuries.¹⁸¹ The extent to which the Scandinavian rock paintings can be used as a source for "Germanic" religious history remains an open question. This question is still the subject of heated debate.¹⁸² The comparison with later Old Norse literature poses great methodological difficulties. Nevertheless, researchers attempt to uncover parallels between the iconography of the "Hällristningar" and the main themes of Eddic poetry. Jan de Vries, for example, compares the figure of the "giant" with a lance, which is depicted at the center of the Litlesby (Tanum) stone, with the god, the Gungnir

(see Broholm 1949 and Lund 1986). Several dozen have been found in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia (mainly in Denmark).

181 In the past, several researchers have attempted to attribute a historical value to the stone carvings (cf. Schück et al. 1914, pp. 56-61 and 64 ff.) or a purely artistic value (Müller 1920, pp. 125-161, especially pp. 157 f.). In today's research, the depictions on the Bronze Age Nordic rock paintings are usually regarded as an expression of a religious cult, although opinions differ on this - the debate centers on the cult of the dead (Ekholm 1916) and the cult of fertility (Almgren 1934 and the original Swedish edition of 1927). However, both aspects are compatible (Hultkrantz 1989). However, the religion practiced in the Bronze Age north may have been rooted in the Indo-European tradition (Schjødt 1986). Cf. also Gelling / Davidson 1969.

182 Cf. Schier 1992, p. 217: "One often endeavors to interpret phenomena of an older time from more recent sources. But perhaps we should sometimes try the other way round and see to what extent older phenomena can help us to understand later ones. Rock art research should be suitable for this. There are no myths that simply be compared with the later ones, but manifestations of the cult are much clearer in the rock paintings than in the much later written sources on Germanic religion".

¹⁸³ However, this quite tempting-sounding theory must remain unproven. Apart from such purely hypothetical considerations about the possible Bronze Age, pre-Germanic precursors of some later Scandinavian myths, the Bohuslän stones nevertheless show an early connection between the wearing of masks, martial traditions and magical-religious rituals. The scenes carved on the stones do not exclusively refer to gods and mythical creatures, but also pass on the cult. Bronze horns and horned helmets were part of the living environment of this period, as is also evidenced by finds from Denmark such as Luren, the Grevensvænge figure and the helmets from Viksø⁽¹⁸⁴⁾.

After the Celtic culture had exerted a strong influence on the north in the last centuries before our era (pre-Roman Iron Age), Germanic society was strongly influenced by contact with the Roman world during the first centuries AD. AD, Germanic society was strongly by contact with the Roman world. This further development can be observed not least in the area of intellectual life, namely in religion and art. In this context, relations between Germanic tribes and tribal associations from the Eurasian steppe should also be mentioned. Beyond the more or less profound changes that took place during this period, however, elements of a certain continuity can also be observed. Despite all the innovations in artistic style, certain iconographic motifs, for example, are repeatedly used on objects that very probably had a cultic function: Horned helmets and animal masks appear on the horns of Gallehus, which date to the 5th century AD.

The gold horns, which were found in 1639 and 1734 in southern Jutland, are among the most remarkable cult objects of the Germanic Iron Age.¹⁸⁵ The runic inscription on one of the horns confirms the Nordic origin of these masterpieces⁽¹⁸⁶⁾

Several ornamental bands are attached around each horn, showing numerous symbolic signs, animals and human figures as well as mythical creatures.

183 Cf. de Vries 1970, 2, p. 44 f. The central depiction by Litlesby is also reproduced in Baltzer 1881-1908, plates 27-29 (fig. 1). The man with a lance is over two meters tall, while the other anthropomorphic figures depicted on the stone are much smaller. Warriors with animal heads can also be seen on the other side of the stone (Baltzer 1881-1890, fig. 6). On the lance Gungnir as an attribute of Óðinn, see, among others, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931), p. 72; *Skáldskaparmál*, p. 122 f. On the symbolism of this divine weapon, see Kuhn 1978.

184 On the figure of Grevensvænge and the helmets of Viksø, see especially Brønsted 1958, 2, pp. 186 and 188; Norling-Christensen 1946; Höfler 1962, pp. 161 f. and figs. 10-12; Schutz 1983, pp. 164 f.; Jensen 1988, p. 334; Gunnell 1995, pp. 43 f.

185 Folke Ström 1961a, p. 64, who assumes that the horns were buried as sacrificial objects, attributes a cultic function to them. This theory seems to be confirmed by the type of figurative decoration on the objects. Cf. Axboe / Heizmann / Nielsen 1998, pp. 330-344; Heizmann 2015.

186 This is the smaller horn, which was discovered in 1734. Cf. e.g. Grønvik 1999; Nielsen 2002.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to examine the original decoration today, as the valuable finds were first stolen by the clockmaker Niels Heidenreich in 1802 and then melted down. However, copies based on the 17th and 18th century engravings can be seen in the National Museum in Copenhagen⁽¹⁸⁷⁾.

Two warriors with wolf heads are clearly recognizable on the large horn. According to Eric Oxenstierna, these images refer directly to cultic customs: "The two wolf-masked warriors in particular must have come directly from the cult."¹⁸⁸ Consequently, the animal masks are also associated with warlike rituals here. The horns of Gallehus thus testify to the ancient character of the connection between mask customs and warlike rituals in the Nordic world (see fig. 13).

Whether a depiction of Odin wearing a wolfskin cap can be recognized on the bracteate IK 641 Weltzin-A (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) discovered in 2007, as Alexandra Pesch suggests, cannot be clearly proven.¹⁸⁹ However, the anthropomorphic head accompanied by a bird and adorned with a diadem and pendilia, which is shown as the main motif on this bracteate, is usually interpreted as a depiction of Odin inspired by Roman imperial images. Since a mighty animal head with an open mouth and pointed ear, which Alexandra Pesch interprets as a wolf's head, can also be seen above the head of God on the Weltzin bracteate, the hypothesis that Odin depicted here as an animal warrior cannot be ruled out. Depictions of Germanic warriors clad in animal skins are also found in Roman art of the imperial period. In his study of ancient Germanic warriors, Michael Speidel bases his typology of the different "warrior styles" largely on his examination of the relief on Trajan's Column.¹⁹⁰ In particular, is made to a scene depicting the emperor on horseback, accompanied by a troop of foot soldiers on a horse.

187 The reconstruction of the larger horn (which was discovered in 1639) is based primarily on the work of Ole Worm (*De aureo cornu*, 1641 and *Danica Monumenta*, 1643, pp. 334-438). See also the engraving of Laueretzen in Holger Jacobaeus' *Museum Regium*, 1696, plate XV and the engraving in volume 1 of Erik Pontoppidan's *Danske Atlas*, 1763, plate VII. The first illustrations of the small horn were published in the following works: Joachim R. Paulli, *Zuverlässiger Abriß des Anno 1734 bei Tundern gefundenen güldenen Horns* (1734); Philipp E. Gutacker, *Explanation of the golden horn found in the county of Schackenburg on April 21, 1734* . . . *Göldene Horn* (1736), with a woodcut by Frost; *Hamburgische Berichte von gelehrten Sachen*, LII, June 29, 1734, p. 433 (with a cut by Fritzsch, probably after Frost); Georg Krysing, *Cornu aurei typus* (1734). Several casts have also been lost. On the various drawings, casts and copies and the interpretation of the iconography, see Oxenstierna 1956, p. 195-199; Axboe / Nielsen / Heizmann 1998, p. 343 and Heizmann 2015, p. 86 f.

188 Oxenstierna 1956, p. 36 f. Cf. also Gunnell 1995, p. 51, who establishes a connection with the masked warriors on the stone images of the Bronze Age.

189 Pesch 2014.

190 Speidel 2004.



Fig. 13: The runeless horn of Gallehus (after Oxenstierna 1956, fig. 19).

the Sarmatian and Roxolan allies of the Dacians in Lower Moesia.¹⁹¹ Some warriors who are close to the emperor and probably form his protection force fight bare-chested.¹⁹² Others wear chain mail.

¹⁹¹ Speidel 2004, pp. 5 (fig. 0.2), 18 (fig. 1.1) and 40 (fig. 2.1). On the relief, cf. also Cichorius 1896, 2, p. 175 f., cat. no. 36, pl. 27.

¹⁹² Speidel 2004, p. 57 f. refers to the warriors with naked upper bodies as "naked berserks" in order to them from the "wolf- and bear-warriors". This term cannot be reconciled with the etymological interpretation of the compound *ber-serkr*, which is based on the root

*(*ursus*) - at least if one follows the most likely theory, which Speidel also subscribes to (p. 43 f.). The concept of the "naked berserk" is based on topoi that have been taken up again and again in the Scandinavian tradition since the saga period - which is not surprising, since these works were only created after the disappearance of the beast warriors. The consonance between the adjective *berr* (*nudus*) and the etymon **ber* (which was gradually replaced by the form *björn* in the Nordic languages) misled the medieval authors twice over (see Chapter II above). They only rarely connect the fury of the *berserksgangr* with the wearing of animal skins (see chapter VII above): The berserker thus appears as a 'warrior without armor'. In contrast, some animal warriors are never described as *berserkers* in the Old Norse sources.

of the auxiliary troops; several of them cover their shoulders and heads with animal skins - presumably bear and wolf pelts.¹⁹³ The ethnic origin of these men leaves no doubt: at the beginning of the 2nd century, the Roman army consisted largely of Germanic peoples, especially Batavians. They served primarily in the cavalry of the imperial guard (the *Equites Singulares Augusti*) and in various elite units (the Cohorts I and II *Batavorum*).¹⁹⁴

The "wolf and bear warriors" of Trajan's Column, who wear neither trumpets nor standards, must not be confused with the *signiferi* and the *cornicini*, who were also clad in skins.¹⁹⁵ The members of Trajan's retinue were probably warriors recruited from various areas of Germania.

(see chapter VIII above). In addition, the custom of fighting *nudis corporibus* has been well documented among the Gaulish peoples since antiquity (cf. Tacitus, *Historiae*, II, xxii). In the north, it survived into the Viking Age: on the battlefield of Stord in 961, the Norwegian king Hákon Aðalsteinfóstri stripped off his armor before facing his opponent (cf. Strophe 4 of the *Hákonar-mál*). This gesture is also reminiscent of certain aspects of *furor berserkicus*. The link between the two traditions (ecstatic frenzy and bare-chested combat) certainly helped to create the later literary stereotype of the berserker. However, the use of the generic name *berserkr* remains restricted to the Norse region and is not attested in any other Old Germanic languages - despite the existence of animal warriors in other areas of the German world (cf. the press plates of Gutenstein, Obrigheim and Fen Drayton, as well as Paulus Diaconus's account of the Longobard dog warriors). The early adoption of Christianity led to the rapid disappearance of the beast warriors, which explains the indirect nature of the evidence and the silence of the continental sources. The lack of a common vocabulary, of which there is no trace in the medieval sources, argues against the generalizing use of the word *berserkr*. If several related but different behaviors are subsumed under the same concept, there is a danger that the investigation of these traditions, whose origins are usually very complex, will be rendered inconclusive in this way. Speidel, however, does not hesitate to take this step by summarizing under one word several forms of warlike frenzy that were known in the Indo-European world (cf. the title of his study published in 2002: *Berserks. A history of Indo-European Mad Warriors*). However, not all "furious warriors" are also berserkers: the identification of the animal warriors with a wild animal is one of the essential elements of this warrior tradition (of which, however, only a faded image can be found in the Icelandic sagas).

193 On the nature of these furs, see the convincing arguments of Speidel 2004, p. 39 ff.

194 Speidel 1994, p. 39 and 109 f.; Speidel 2004, p. 7.

195 Musicians and standard bearers also frequently appear on Trajan's Column (cf. Cichorius 1896, plate I, figs. VII, VIII, XVII, XXXi, XXXIII, XXXV, XXXVII, XXXVIII, XXXIX, XLII, XLIV; plate II, figs. LIV, LXXII, LXXV, LXXVII, LXXIX, LXXXI, LXXXIII, XCIII, XCIV, C). Paul Couissin attributes the special clothing of the *signiferi* and *cornicini* to the imitation of Germanic models; they could also be trophies that were snatched from the enemy (Couissin 1926, p. 422 f.). This tradition emerged in the Roman army in the course of the 1st century. It first developed among the auxiliary troops (cf. the tombstones of Pintaius, *signifer* of the 5th cohort of *Asturum*, and of Genialis, *signifer* of the 8th cohort of *Raetorum*; these stones date to the reigns of Claudius and Nero. They were found near Bonn and Mainz and are recorded under the numbers 8098 and 11868 in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, XIII, *Inscriptiones trium Galliarum et Germaniarum Latinae*. For further references to

and whose value was known to the Romans, who had to face them regularly in battles since the time of the Republic. The wearing of animal skins seems to be an old tradition among Germanic warriors⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ (even if the stereotypical character of the Germanic image in the ancient tradition must of course be taken into account). Plutarch (*Vitae parallelae*, *Marius*, XXV), for example, attributes masks to the Cimbri whose shape imitates the gaping mouth of wild animals (εἰκασμένα θηρίων φοβερῶν χάσμασι). The auxiliaries during the imperial period sometimes no less fearsome. A few decades before Trajan's accession to the throne, Vitellius' men frightened the people of Rome with their wild appearance: Tacitus describes them as *tergis ferarum et ingentibus telis horrentes* (*Historiae*, II, lxxxviii).

The fur-clad warriors, of whom the relief on Trajan's Column provides a tangible, realistic image, are reminiscent of the animal warriors of Scandinavia and fulfill the same role as protectors of the ruler: Grouped around the emperor, they are ready to form a rampart with their bodies and shields, just like the *úlfheðnar* with whom - according to the skald Þórbjörn hornklofi - King Haraldr hárfagri surrounded himself eight centuries later (cf. *Haraldskvæði*, Str. 21: *áræðism nnum einum / hykk þar undir felisk / skyli sá en skilvisi*).

During the Viking Age, however, the existence of beast warriors is not only recorded in skaldic poetry. Archaeological material also proves that "Óðinn's men" belonged to Scandinavian society.

2 The material of the Viking Age

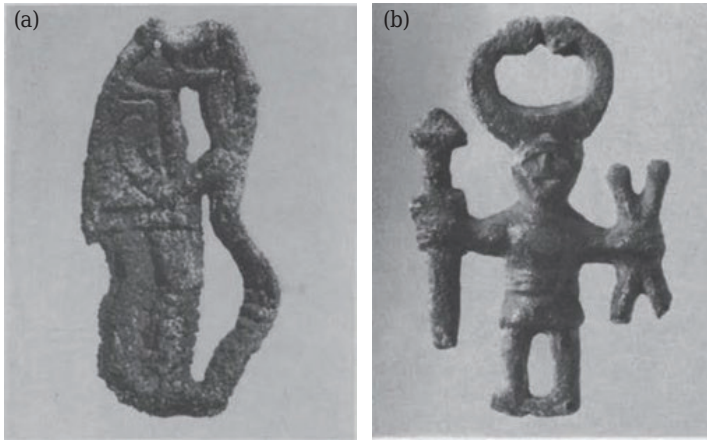
In 1968, two bronze figures, each 3 cm high, were discovered in a cremation grave from the early 10th century in Ekhammar (Kungsängen, Uppland).¹⁹⁷ The first figure depicts a warrior holding a sword in one hand and two crossed sticks (probably lance fragments) in the other. The man is wearing a horned helmet, the ends of which end in bird or snake heads. The second figure is dressed in a short, sleeveless shirt and his face is concealed under a wolf mask. This animal warrior appears to be holding a spear with a long piece of iron attached to it - if it is not the depiction of a wolf.

the cohorts and the legion, cf. Speidel 2004, pp. 41 f. and 222 f.). This custom seems to have disappeared after the reign of Septimus Severus (cf. Couissin 1926, p. 423 f.). The wearing of wolfskins is also known at an earlier point in Roman military history, namely during the Punic Wars (Polybios, *Historíai*, VI, 22, on the Velites).

196 On the wearing of fur costumes in Germanic antiquity, cf. e.g. Schier 1951, p. 15 f.

197 The dating comes from Ringquist 1969, p. 295 f. Several objects found in Ekhammar are reminiscent of similarly crafted objects from graves in Birka dating to around the year 900.

of a snake. According to Speidel, the animal warrior of Ekhammar represents the Greek hero Sigmund, the conqueror of a dragon.¹⁹⁸ However this attempt at interpretation is to be assessed, the small group of the two figures of Ekhammar, which combines a "weapon dancer" with an animal warrior, represents a striking parallel to matrix D of Torslunda (see figs. 14a and 14b).



Figs. 14a and 14b: Bronze figures from Ekhammar (Photographs: Sören Hallgren, from Ringquist 1969, pp. 288-289).

A fragment of the tapestry found in the ship burial at Oseberg in the 9th century combines the depictions of a weapon dancer and a masked warrior once again.¹⁹⁹ The scene depicted on this tapestry is possibly based on a famous episode in Norse history: the Battle of Brávellir,²⁰⁰ in the course of which King Haraldr hilditönn was defeated. Several Scandinavian sources describe this event, above all the *Gesta Danorum* (VII, xii-VIII, v), the *Heiðreks saga*,²⁰¹ the *Bósa saga* (chap. IX) and

198 Speidel 2004, pp. 33-36. In the Old English poem *Beowulf*, v. 874-900, Sigemund slays a terrifying *wyrm* ("serpent", "dragon"). In the *Völsunga saga* (Ch. VIII), Sigmundr is transformed into a wolf (for Sigmundr's transformation episode, see Ch. V above). However, the most famous dragon slayer in the Germanic tradition remains Sigmund's son: Si-gurðr/Siegfried.

199 Krafft 1956, p. 32 (fragment 3) and Hougen 1940, pp. 101 and 115 (figs. 71 and 9). On Oseberg's excavations, see above all the four volumes published by Brøgger / Falk / Shetelig 1917-1928 (1-3, 5). A final volume (4), devoted to textiles, was published in 2006 under the direction of Arne E. Christensen.

200 Cf. Ingstad 1992, p. 245.

201 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 157.

the *Fornkonunga saga* (Chapter IX). The memory of this battle is thus based on sources with legendary features. The author of the *Sögubrot* particularly emphasizes the presence of "shieldmaidens"²⁰² in the Danish army, one of whom enters the battlefield as the leader of her berserkers:

Ok í annan fylkingar arm Haralds konúgs var Heiðr skjaldmær með sínu merki, ok hefir hún með sér hundrað kappa; þeir voru berserkir hennar: Grímr, Geirr, Hólmssteinn, Eysöðull, Heðinn mjófi, Dagr Lífski, Haraldr þar voru margir höfðingjar með Heiði í arminn.²⁰³

(And in the other wing of King Haraldr's army was the shieldmaiden Heiðr with her standard, and she had 100 warriors with her; they were her berserkers: Grímr, Geirr, Hólms- teinn, Eysöðull, Heðinn mjófi, Dagr Lífski, Haraldr; many leaders were with Heiðr in that wing).

According to Saxo Grammaticus, Óðinn (Othinus) also intervenes in the course of the battle, disguised as Bruno, a loyal companion of King Haraldus. Deceived by this ruse, the king hands over the reins of his chariot to the god of war, who deals him a fatal blow⁽²⁰⁴⁾.

The most important protagonists of the battle are gathered on the Oseberg carpet: The female figures with weapons probably the 'shield maidens'; Haraldr hilditönn is shown in his chariot in the midst of his troops, while Óðinn - one-eyed²⁰⁵ and wearing a horned helmet²⁰⁶ - spurs on an animal warrior to attack (see fig. 15). The latter can be recognized by the fur that covers him from head to toe²⁰⁷ and by the lance, which, like the animal warriors of Tors-

202 The saga motif of the *skjaldmær* ("shieldmaiden") in Norse literature shows close links to the mythical figure of the Valkyrie (cf. *Völsunga saga*, Chapter IX).

203 *Fornkonunga saga*, ch. VIII (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 379).

204 The *Sögubrot* does not explicitly mention that Óðinn disguises himself as Brúni (Bruno), although the latter, whom King Haraldr allows to determine the order of battle, slays his commander at the end of the battle. Nevertheless, the god Óðinn clearly plays a central role in King Haraldr's defeat in *Sögubrot*: King Haraldr accuses of favoring his opponent by him advice. The enemy army does indeed form up in the shape of an angle - a tactical procedure whose secret the lord of Asgard had previously only revealed to Haraldr (it is the *svínfylking*, the *caput porcinum* of the Latin authors, which Saxo *corniculata acies*). Haraldr nevertheless promises to sacrifice all the men who fall to the god Óðinn: *allan þann val, sem fellr á þeim velli, gef ek Óðni* ('all the dead who fall in this field I will give to Óðinn').

205 Cf. the comment by Speidel 2004, p. 126. This detail is clearly visible in the drawing by M. Storm (Speidel 2004, p. 125, fig. 11.5), in which the only figure with an eye is the wearer of the horned helmet.

206 A second armored dancer wearing a horned helmet also appears on another fragment of the Oseberg carpet, cf. Krafft 1956, p. 30 (fragment 1) and Hougen 1940, p. 93 (fig. 1). 207 Cf. Hougen 1940, pp. 104 and 114. Some masked figures can also be found on other fragments; however, their female outline suggests that they Valkyries (cf. Gunnell 1995, pp. 61 f. and fig. 38).

lunda, Obrigheim and Gutenstein towards the ground. This image not only refers to a mythical past: it probably also reflects the actual appearance and behavior of contemporary berserkers, which must have been a familiar spectacle for the people who built the tomb of Oseberg. According to one controversial theory, Queen Ása,²⁰⁸ the grandmother of the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri, was buried in this grave. But even without proof of Ása's burial at this site, it can be established that the pictorial representation of the beast warrior on the Oseberg tapestry and the earliest written sources about the Old Norse Berserker come from the same milieu, the Norwegian aristocracy of the 9th century.



Fig. 15: Fragment of the carpet from Oseberg (Oldsaksamlingen at the University of Oslo, drawing from Hougen 1940, p. 116, fig. 9).

²⁰⁸ Cf. Brøgger 1916, p. 50 ff. This question is still the subject of heated debate today (cf. inter the comments by Dillmann 2000a, p. 428 f.; Christensen 1992, p. 267 f.).

A more recent find may also be among the archaeological finds of Viking Age animal disguises: two masks found in 1980 in Haithabu (an. *Heiðabýr*) in the calf joint of a 10th century ship. The structure and reconstructed shape of these pieces of fabric realistically imitate the fur and shape of a bear's head (see Figs. 16a and 16b). Inga Hägg considers the masks found in the old Danish *emporion* to be accessories of cultic pantomimes, possibly connected to the traditions of animal warriors.²⁰⁹ However, there is no evidence for the actual form and use of these remains.

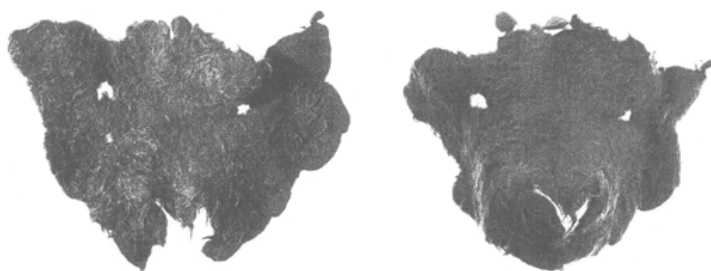


Fig. 16a: Mask from Haithabu. Fragment 14D, red felt, 19x14 cm (photograph of the mask by E. Tams, reconstruction of the original form by H.-J. Mocka, from Hägg 1984a, p. 71).

With the decline of paganism from the 11th century onwards, the animal warriors also disappeared. The archaeological material from the end of the Viking Age shows a new image that corresponds to the stereotypes developed in the Icelandic sagas: The berserkers of Lewis's chess game wear no skins; their faces are contorted with rage and they bite the edges of their shields with their teeth.²¹⁰

Nevertheless, another figure – a zoomorphic mask – can be found on one of the rune stones of Källby (Vg 56), which was erected in Sweden around the year 1000.²¹¹ The inscription on Vg 56 is a simple funerary inscription,²¹² which can be found in

209 Hägg 1984^a and Hägg 1984b as well as the article by Inga Hägg in Beck / Hägg / Steuer 2001, p. 390 f. Cf. also Bregenhøj 2000.

210 The walrus bone figures, which were made in Norway in the 12th century, were found on the Hebrides in 1831. They are now kept in the British Museum in London and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh (see Chapter VII above).

211 For the inscription Vg 56, see above all Jungner / Svärdström 1940/1970; Jansson 1987, p. 119. Today, this stone stands opposite another grave monument whose inscription and symbolic content are undoubtedly Christian (Vg 55): The second stone, decorated with a large cross, is in fact dedicated to a "Christian man who had a good faith in God" ([k]ristin: man: saR: hafði: kuþa: tru: til: kus:). The positioning of the two monuments opposite each other is more ; the stone with the inscription Vg 56 was not here before the 17th century.

212 "Styr[!]akr set this stone after Kaur, his father": stur[!]akr+ sati+ stin+ þasi+ (i) ftiR+ kaur+ faþur+ sin. The accusative kaur possibly comes from the first name Kárr.

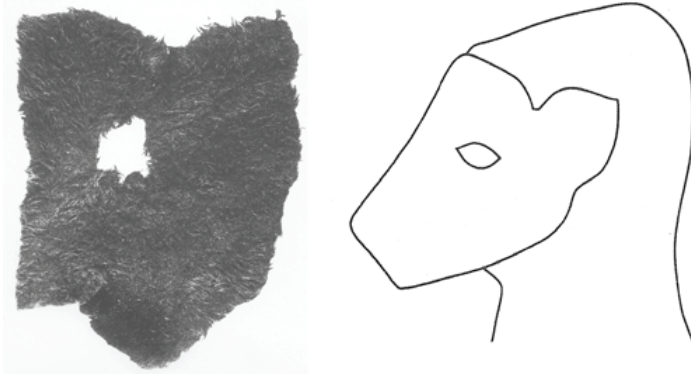


Fig. 16b: Half-mask from Haithabu fragment 25, brown fabric, 26x20 cm (photograph by E. Tams, drawings by H.-J. Mocka, from Hägg 1984a, pp. 70 and 72).

is not related to the accompanying iconography (see fig. 17). However, it is not completely preserved. Part of the inscription disappears on the left side of the stone, which is badly damaged. The personal name *Kárr* (literally: "frizzy hair"),⁽²¹³⁾ which is rendered in the inscription in the form *kaur* (Akk.), does not point to a direct connection with the eponymic traditions of animal warriors. Otto Höfler has nevertheless emphasized a possible connection between the name and the numinous character attributed to certain types of hairstyle in Germanic beliefs. This connection is particularly well documented for the Óðinn cult (cf. the first name Óðinkárr, which is recorded in Danish runic inscriptions in the form *opinkaur*,⁽²¹⁴⁾ "the one with the Óðinn curls").²¹⁵ Unfortunately, the frequent use of the name *Kárr* (or *Kári*) throughout the Nordic world²¹⁶ does not allow us to draw more precise conclusions about the inscription Vg 56.

However, other Scandinavian inscriptions mention personal names that are closely associated with the world of animal warriors - and have been since the Vendel period.

213 Müller 1970, p. 34; Lundgren 1892/1934, p. 147; Knudsen 1936/1940, p. 74 f.; Lind 1905-1915, 2nd ed, Sp. 675 f. and 679 f.

214 In a nominative form (*upinkau[r]*, DR 133), in an accusative form (*upinkaur*, DR 81A, DR 239A) and in a genitive form (*upinkaurs*, DR 4A).

215 Höfler 1952a, p. 126 f.; cf. also Schramm 1957, p. 75. For another etymological interpretation, see Kousgård Sørensen 1974 (composition of **wóðana-*, "frenzy" and *-kárr*, cf. Petersen 2007, p. 171).

216 See, among other things, the list of names in *the Landnámabók* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1900), p. 360 f.



Fig. 17: Stone from Källby, Vg 56 (photograph from Jungner / Svärdström 1940/1970, plate 45).

C Runic inscriptions

Three Late Norse rune stones from Listers härad in the west of the Swedish province of Blekinge form a remarkable group of monuments that not only exhibit special features relevant to the development of the Norse language and runic writing⁽²¹⁷⁾ but are also of particular interest for the study of the beliefs and customs of the early Vendelian upper class of Scandinavia. These are the stones from Istaby (DR 359), Stentoften (DR 357) and Gummarp (DR 358).²¹⁸ According to the inscriptions on these stones

217 The Blekinger inscriptions are considered important evidence of the transition from the older to the younger Futhark. They also prove a phase of phonetic development leading from Proto-Nordic to Old Norse. Cf. .g. Musset 1965, pp. 64 and 219; Williams 2001, p. 511.

218 Cf. among others von Friesen 1916; Jacobsen / Moltke 1942; Krause / Jankuhn 1966 (No. 48, 51, 63);

Moltke 1985; Jansson 1987, p. 20 f.; Santesson 1989; Düwel 1992; Santesson 1993; Birkmann 1995, pp. 114-142; Grønvik 1996; Sundqvist 1997; Nymann / Williams 2001, pp. 508-512; Sundqvist / Hult- gård 2004; Buti 2006; Schulte 2014. On the genealogical aspects, see Lind 1905-1915; Lind- quist 1947; Schramm 1957; Williams 1998; Andersson 2002. At the entrance to the church of Sölvesborg - from whose vicinity the stones of Istaby, Gunmarp and Stentoften also originate - there is today a fifth rune stone (DR 356), which, however, is said to be more than a hundred years younger (cf. Schulte 2014).

It can be assumed from the names that appear that they were probably all erected by members of the same family, the "Wulfinge" (cf. an. *Ylfingar*),²¹⁹ in the period between 550 and 650. As similar curse formulae appear both in the inscription from Stentofte and on the almost contemporary stone from Björketorp (DR 360), the latter runic monument is often grouped with the three above-mentioned stones under the collective name "Bleking Stones". Whether the erection of the Björketorp stone was also commissioned by the same clan of petty kings remains an open question.

The Istaby Runic Stone, which was authenticated in 1748 near the church of Istaby near Sölvesborg, has been kept in the Statens Historiska Museet in Stockholm since 1878. The inscription, which engraved on two sides of the approximately 180 cm high stone, is divided into three vertical lines:

AfatRhAriwulafa / hApuwulafRhAeruulafiR // warAitrunARþAiAR

(In memory of HarifwulfR / HApuwulfR (son or descendant) of HaeruulfR // wrote these runes.)²²⁰

This sentence is one of the first examples of commemoration of the dead on a rune stone and commemorates three generations of a family. All the names cited on this stone contain the element *-wulfR* (an. *úlfir*, "wolf"), which is associated with alliterative martial terms²²¹ (*Hari-*, *Hapu-*, *Haeru-*), and thus correspond to the naming traditions of the aristocratic society of the old North.²²²

219 Cf. Krause / Jankuhn 1966, p. 204 f.; Sundqvist / Hultgård 2004, p. 584 ff.; Rübekeil 2007; Düwel 2008, p. 42 f.; Schulte 2014. The *Ylfingar* are mentioned in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1931, p. 183) as well as in several Eddic poems: *Hyndluljóð*, str. 16; *Helgakviða hundingsbana qnnor*, prose introduction, str. 4, 8 and 47; *Helgakviða hundingsbana in fyrri*, str. 5, 34 and 49. The *Fornkonunga saga* (Bjarni Guðnason (ed.) 1982, chap. IV, p. 57) and the *Ynglinga saga* (chap. XXXVII, p. 67) mention the king Hjörvarðr Ylfingr. The name of the *Ylfingar* also appears in the Anglo-Saxon poems *Widsith* (v. 29) and *Beowulf* (the *Wylfingas* in v. 461 and 471).

220 According to another interpretation (cf. e.g. von Friesen 1916; Krause 1966), the inscription consists of two separate sentences: The sequence of runes AfatRhAriwulafa could be interpreted as an elliptical memorial ("For Hariwolf [stands the stone]"), while the second sentence could be interpreted as a "runic master formula".

221 The royal genealogies handed down in the Old Norse sources provide many examples of alliterative name series (cf. e.g. the sequence Dómalði, Dómarr, Dyggvi and Dagr in the *Ynglingatal*).

222 Bipartite (or dithematic) personal names are characteristic of the Germanic personal name structure. This type of name, inherited from the Indo-European period (cf. Schmitt 1996, among others), which "was originally at home in the high and highest social classes" (Andersson 2009, p. 10), most likely originated from male names or heroic he- pitheta in heroic poetry (Schramm 1957; Schramm 2013). In the Germanic name treasury, personal names of this type are often formed from an animal name (cf. Müller 1970; Beck 1986).

Hapuwulfr is the "battle-wolf".²²³ The element *Hapu-* corresponds to the Old English *heado-* ("battle") or the Old Norse *hǫð*, which in poetry has the meaning "battle", "fight"⁽²²⁴⁾ (cf. also an. *Hálfr*, ae. *Heathulf*, and Frankish, Bavarian and Alam. *Chadulf*, *Hadolf*, *Hatolf*, *Hadulf*, mhd. *Haduwolf*, *Hatho-* wolf). An identical construction with the noun "bear" is attested in Old Saxon: *Hathubern*.²²⁵

Hariwulfr is the "army wolf".²²⁶ The first element corresponds to an. *herr*, and denotes an "army". The name can be found in two other inscriptions from the Viking Age: Øster Løgum in Denmark (DR 15: *hairulfr*) and Valby in Sweden (Sö 88: "*Heriulfr* erected this stone with *Fastulfr*, in memory of his father *GælfR* and his uncle *Úlfviðr*").²²⁷ The urnordic *Hariwulfr* is related to an. *HerjólfR*, as well as with Frankish, Bavarian and Alam. *Chariulf*, *Hariulf*, *Heriulf*, *Herolf*.⁽²²⁸⁾ The Old English *Herewulf* is also documented as an appellative: It is a metaphor for "Warrior".⁽²²⁹⁾ A 5th century stone,²³⁰ which is kept in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier under inventory number 186, mentions a certain *Hariulfus*. This person came from a royal Burgundian family (*regalis gentis Burgundionum*) - a family which, according to ancient and medieval tradition originated in the Baltic region.²³¹

**Haeruwulfr* is the "sword-wolf". This name appears on the Stone of Istaby in the form *haeruwulafR*. The first element corresponds to an. *hiǫrr*, "sword". The second element is based on *-wulfr*, to which a suffix is added that determines the family affiliation (Uro-Nordic *-ijaR* is contracted here to *-iR*).²³² It is therefore a patronymic.⁽²³³⁾ Consequently, **Haeruwulfr* can be identified as the ancestor of this Yl-fingar dynasty.

223 Cf. Janzén 1947, p. 75.

224 Cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, p. 309.

225 For all these names and other references, see Müller 1970, p. 179 f.

226 A comparable construction with bear is documented in a Swedish runic inscription: *hiarbiarn* (U 444, Bromsta, Odensala socken; the names *Úlfr*, *Nesbjörn* and *Borgúlfr* appear on this stone). Cf. also an. *Herbjörn*.

227 *GælfR* is the shortened form of an. *Geirúlfr*. All four names that were borne within the same family contain the element *-ulfr*.

228 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 181.

229 Cf. e.g. *Genesis*, V. 2015 (cf. Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, I, p. 534).

230 Cf. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, XIII, no. 3682.

231 Cf. the *Passio Sancti Sigismundi regis* (Krusch (ed.) 1888, p. 333). Pliny (*Naturalis historia*, IV, xxviii) counts the Burgundians among the Vindili, a people on the coast of the Baltic Sea. In addition, the surviving Burgundian language remnants show some East Germanic characteristics. Although an etymological relationship with the Norwegian place name *Borgund* on the Sognefjord cannot be ruled out, modern research assumes an original connection between the Burgundians and the island of Bornholm (cf. e.g. Anton et al. 1981; Musset 1994, p. 111; Nyman 2002).

232 Cf. Lindquist 1947, p. 16.

233 Cf. Kousgård Sørensen 1984, pp. 46-51.

The urnordic *HaeruwulfR can be connected with an. Hǫrólfr²³⁴ as well as with Frankish, Bavarian and Alam. Cherulf, Herolf, Herulf, got. Ἡρίουλφος²³⁵ and ae. Heoruwulf (whose appellative form also denotes a warrior).²³⁶

Thorsten Andersson emphasizes that the three names reflect the heroic values of a warrior elite inspired by the ideals expressed in ancient Germanic poetry: "They are two-part names in which battle and heroism play a prominent role.....The three

But names were not given without regard to the literal meaning. They were undoubtedly carefully chosen by the chiefdom."²³⁷

Furthermore, these personal names demonstrate a special connection to the religious sphere and cultic traditions, as the writings of Gummarp and Stentoften also prove.

The approximately 62 cm high stone from Gummarp was discovered in 1627 in the vicinity of Sölvesborg Castle before being brought to Copenhagen in 1652, where it was lost in the great fire of 1728. An interpretation is therefore only possible on the basis of drawings from the 17th century.²³⁸

Four sides of the stone are inscribed as follows:

(h)AþuwolAfA / sAte / (s)tA(b)Aþria / fff

(HapuwulfR / set / three bars / fff)

Since the surviving inscriptions in the form hAþuwolAfA (without R), we must assume either a scribal error by the draughtsman, who would have forgotten an R, or the omission of some runes at the beginning of the inscription, which can be interpreted as incomplete. In the first case, we would have to assume a nominative (hAþuwolAfAR) (cf. the translation suggested above). In the second case, the text would have to be supplemented by the preposition AfatR, which would be followed by an accusative (hAþuwolAfA). Furthermore, it can be assumed that the name of the rune master has been dropped before the verb (sAte). The inscription would then be interpreted as follows: "(After) HAþuwolAfAR stands this stone. NN. set three staffs fff."²³⁹ Although a commemorative form with the preposition *af*R also occurs on the stone of Istaby and the stone

234 The *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, chapter IX (Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 35) knows two legendary kings: Two brothers called Hǫrólfr and Hálfr.

235 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 181.

236 Cf. *Exodus*, v. 181 (cf. Bosworth / Toller 1898-1921, 1, p. 531).

237 Andersson 2002, p. 1132; see also Schramm 1957; Andersson 1998, p. 20 f.

238 Cf. among others the manuscript *AM 369 fol* (with the drawing by Jon Skonvig, which was taken over by Ole Worm in *Runic seu Danica literatura antiquissima*, 1636, p. 65 and in *Monumenta Danica*, 1643-1650, p. 219).

239 Birkmann 1995, p. 117; cf. also the interpretation by Looijenga 2003.

of Gummarp was cut off at the foot, "the assumption that there should be a memorial inscription here analogous to the stone of Istaby . . . has little merit"²⁴⁰.

The triple repetition of the f-rune most likely corresponds to a sacrificial formula - no doubt to achieve fertility (**fēhu*, an. *fē*, "cattle", "possessions", "wealth"). The Old English *feoh*/Old Norse *fē* stands for the first sign of *fupark* in the Old English, Norwegian and Icelandic runic poems.⁽²⁴¹⁾ In addition, the magical effect of the repetition of runic staves is well attested in Eddic poetry (cf. *Skírnismál*, Str. 36).²⁴²

The name HapuwulfR also appears on the inscriptions from Istaby and Stentofte. Whether it always the same "descendant of Haeru- wulfR" remains to be seen. However, the runic carver from Gummarp was just as adept at using magical formulas as the HapuwulfR mentioned on the stone from Stentofte.

This 1.18 m high stone was discovered in 1823 on the sound opposite the former island of Lister, with the inscription facing the ground and surrounded by five (loose) standing stones (an. *Bautasteinar*). The stone from Stentofte has been on display in Sölvesborg church since 1864. There is no consensus on the interpretation of the six lines of the entire inscription⁽²⁴³⁾.

In the first sentence, the name HapuwulfR appears as a subject:

niuhAborumR / niuhagestumR / hApuwolAfRgAfj

In all probability, the last rune of the third line is to be read as a term rune for *jára*, an. *ár*, "(good) year" (i.e.: "harvest luck")²⁴⁴ and thus as a direct object to the predicate gAf ("gave"). The first two lines have been interpreted in various ways since Sophus Bugge⁽²⁴⁵⁾. In most cases, the variation of A- and a (niuhA- / niuha-) was as random, so that these runic sequences were either interpreted as niuhAborumR / niuha-gestumR ("the new settlers / the new guests") or as niuhAborumR / niu ha-gestumR ("the nine high sons / the new high guests")²⁴⁶. However, the equation of gestumR and an. *gestum* (*gæstum*) is pro-

240 Schulte 2014, p. 41; see Dillmann 2000b, p. 367; McKinnell / Simek / Düwel 2004, p. 56.

241 Dickins 1915, pp. 12-23 (Old English runic poems), pp. 24-27 (Norwegian runic poems), pp. 28-33 (Icelandic runic poems); Bauer 2003. On the names of the runes, see Musset 1965, p. 106 f. On the magical formulas of the repetition of the same rune, see Musset 1965, p. 146 f.

242 For further literary and epigraphic references, see Schulte 2014, p. 40.

243 For an overview of these proposed interpretations, see Birkmann 1995, p. 125-137; Williams 2001; McKinnell / Simek / Düwel 2004, p. 54 ff.; Schulte 2014.

244 Cf. e.g. von Friesen 1916, p. 45 f.; Bauer 2003 (p. 37 f. and 102 f.) on the meaning of the j-rune in the medieval runic poems. On the Old Norse term *ár*, cf. e.g. Hultgård 2003.

245 Bugge 1891/1903, p. 23 f. Cf. also Krause 1966, p. 212.

246 Marstrander 1952, p. 127; see also the variant by Grønvik 1987, pp. 120-125; *niuhā-borumR* / *niuhā-gestumR* ('To the nine Óðinns sons, the nine Óðinns guests').

blematic, since at this linguistic level the rune A (or a) would be expected as a rendering of /æ/.²⁴⁷ Lillemor Stantesson proposed a new interpretation in 1989, which is widely accepted in today's research:⁽²⁴⁸⁾ "With nine he-goats (niu hAborumR, cf. germ. *habraz), with nine stallions (niu ha(n)gestumR, cf. germ.

*hangistaz, *hængestR), gave Haduwolf a good year."

The significance of the number nine in the pre-Christian cult sacrifices of Scandinavia is documented by later medieval sources (see, among others, Adam of Bremen, IV, 27, and Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, I, 17).⁽²⁴⁹⁾ As Anders Hultgård notes, the Stentoften inscription "probably had the purpose of recording a particular sacrifice performed for harvest happiness in the memory of the cult community and future generations"⁽²⁵⁰⁾.

As a member of the *Ylfingar* chieftainship, HaþuwulfR was probably responsible for the practice of public worship.⁽²⁵¹⁾ The concept of the ár-bringing ruler, who harvest luck with him, corresponds to a "ruler ideology", which finds its expression in numerous testimonies in Old Norse literature (cf. e.g. the epithet *ársæll*, borne by several Scandinavian kings)⁽²⁵²⁾.

The name HariwulfR appears in the rest of the text of the Stentoften inscription, albeit in a sequence of runes that has remained obscure despite all previous attempts at interpretation:

hAriwolAfR(m)A-usnuh-e

The last two lines of the inscription contain a curse formula intended to protect the place of worship from potential abusers:

hideRrunonofel(Ah)ekAhed/erAginoronoR/

herAmAlAsARArAgeuwe(lA)dudsApAt/bAriutiþ

Michael Schulte interprets this passage as follows: "The shining runes (row) I hide here, mighty runes. Through arrogance (i.e. perversity) restless/unprotected, he who destroys this (monument) meets a treacherous death."²⁵³

247 See Schulte 2014, p. 49.

248 Cf. Santesson 1989 and 1993. Düwel 1992, Sundqvist 1997, Schulte 1998, Nielsen 2000, Antonsen 2002, Schulte 2006 and Schulte 2014, among others, have followed Santesson's interpretation. Cf. *contra*: Reichert 2003; Grünzweig 2006; Buti 2006; Mees 2011.

249 Cf. Sundqvist 2002, p. 133 ff.; see also Schulte 2014, p. 52 f. for further evidence from the Indo-Germanic world.

250 Hultgård 2003, p. 303.

251 Cf. Sundqvist / Hultgård 2004, p. 597.

252 Cf. Hultgård 2003, p. 289 f.

253 Schulte 2014, p. 48.

On the 4 m high rune stone of Björketorp (DR 360, Metelstad), which together with two lower building stones forms a triangular stone setting erected for ritual purposes near the village of Listerby, about sixty kilometers from Listers härad, there is a similar, albeit slightly averted, incantation - albeit without mention of personal names⁽²⁵⁴⁾.

What is the relationship between the stones of Istaby, Gummarp

The relationship between the persons mentioned in Listers härad and Stentoften cannot be determined more precisely. Based on a theory by Wolfgang Krause, Lucien Musset²⁵⁵ proposed the following scheme: "Les mêmes personnages reviennent sur les textes du Listers härad et paraissent s'ordonner en une généalogie continue à quatre générations: Hapuwulfar I (Gummarp, Stentoften), père de Hariwolafar (Stentoften, Istaby), père lui-même de Haeruwolafar (Istaby), père à son tour de Hapuwulfar II (Istaby)." Of course, other genealogies are also possible,²⁵⁶ as researchers are not in agreement about the relative age of the stones. Nevertheless, these three inscriptions point to a clan of rulers who bore wolf names and were entrusted with cultural tasks.

A number of inscriptions from the Viking Age also contain names associated with the tradition of animal warriors.

The Rök stone (Ög 136) from the 9th century provides valuable evidence of this - even if the text of this inscription mainly refers to a legendary past.

The overall interpretation of this inscription, which with around 750 runes - including several cryptographic "secret runes" - is the longest known runic inscription, cannot be discussed in this study: Although the text is well preserved except for a small damaged portion on the right edge of the back of the stone, the inscription has been the subject of some 40 different attempts at explanation.²⁵⁷ At this point, reference should only be made to Lars Lönnroth's theory²⁵⁸ regarding a *pula* ('list of names') that can be read in lines 14 to 19 of the inscription.

The runic knight mentions a group of 20 kings (t/uaiR tikiR kununkaR) who "sat on Zealand, four winters long, with four names, sons of four brothers" (satin [a]t siulunti fia/kura uintur at fiakurum, nabnum burn/[i]R fiakurum bruprum): "five (by name) Valke, Radulf's sons" (ualkaR fim rapulfs [s]u/ niR), "five (by name) Hreidulf, Rugulf's sons" (hraiþulfaR fim rukulfs [s]u niR),

254 On the runic inscription from Björketorp, Jacobsen 1935; Birkmann 1995, p. 120 f.; Schulte 2014, p. 42 f.

255 Cf. Musset 1965, p. 64.

256 Cf. inter alia Birkmann 1995.

257 Cf. Gustavson / Nyman 2003, pp. 62-72 for references to more recent literature as well as Grønvik 2003 and Harris 2006.

258 Cf. Lönnroth 1977, p. 31 f.

"five (by name) Haisl, Harud's sons" (haislaR fim haruþ/s suniR), "five (by name) Gunnmund,²⁵⁹ Björn's sons" (kunnmuntaR fim bi[a]rnaR suniR).

Three of these four brothers, who are described in this *þula* as the fathers of five kings of the same name, bear theriophore names that refer to the wolf (Radulf) or bear (Björn). Based on an etymological interpretation attempt by Jan de Vries²⁶⁰, Lönnroth interprets the name Haruð as *heiti* for the bear ("forest-dweller").²⁶¹

Lönnroth associates this *þula* with a verse of the *Qrvar-Odds saga*, in which the names of the twelve sons of Argrímr - all berserkers - are given in the form of an alliterative enumeration.²⁶² In addition, he also suggests an analogy with a warlike band of Norwegian brothers mentioned in the *Gesta Danorum* (VII, ii, 11) and bearing names of the same type - on *-Björn*, "bear" - (Gerbiorn, Gunbiorn, Arinbiorn, Stenbiorn, Esbiorn, Thorbiorn and Biorn). Consequently, Lönnroth interprets this passage of the Rök inscription as an "animal warrior story": "It is possible to conclude that the legend about the twenty kings and their four fathers must have been a story about berserks and wolfsmen. "

Within the younger runic corpus as a whole, one repeatedly encounters certain given names whose etymological interpretation is reminiscent of similar traditions: ulfhiþin (cf. the Old Norse name *úlfheðinn*) on the stone of Igelsta (Sö 307, see fig. 18);²⁶³ hiþinbiarn (cf. an. *Bjarnheðinn*)²⁶⁴ next to a certain fastbiarn on the stone of Broholm (U 920); biarnaffpi⁽²⁶⁵⁾ ('bear's head'), whose father bears the same name, on the stone of the church of Björklinge (U 1045); biar- hufpi (also 'bear's head') on the fragment of Hägeby (U 1113), natfari (cf. an. *Náttfari*, which can be associated with Náttólfr and Kveld-Úlfr)⁽²⁶⁶⁾ on the stone from Bjudby (Sö 54). Although these inscriptions (with the exception of the rune stone of Istaby) can no longer be regarded as expressions of a pre-Christian culture, they provide valuable evidence for the study of the abundant supply of Old Norse dichotomous, theriophore names⁽²⁶⁷⁾.

259 Cf. the name Guðmundrín *Þorsteinsbæjarmagns*, chap. V, in Tietz (ed./trans.) 2012, p. 48 (see also Höfler 1963, p. 101).

260 Cf. de Vries 1962, p. 281, note 56: "probably to ae. *harað*, *hared* 'forest' in ON".

261 Cf. Lönnroth 1977, p. 33.

262 Rafn (ed.) 1829, p. 211 f.

263 Cf. Brate / Wessén 1924/1936, I, p. 283 f. This inscription probably dates to the 10th century; it was therefore created more or less at the same time as the *Haraldskvæði* (see chap. II above).

264 The name also appears on the U 1038 stone.

265 Cf. the place name Björnhovda.

266 Cf. Müller 1970, p. 135.

267 Whether the two-part name (w)iduhudar, *WiduhundaR*, (actually "forest dog", transliteration of wolf), which appears on a clasp from the Himlingøje cemetery (early 3rd century), is to be interpreted as a simple personal name or as a transliteration of "wolf" remains controversial. Cf. e.g. Reichert 1992, p. 572; Lund Hansen 1999.



Fig. 18: Stone from Igelsta, Sö 307, Igelsta kvern, Södertälje (photograph from Brate / Wessén 1924/1936, plate 155).

Some of these names belong to the so-called "primary formations",²⁶⁸ which were mostly derived from originally appellative composites and thus represent the oldest layer of Germanic personal names. This eponymic evidence sheds light on the main characteristics associated with the tradition of animal warriors, such as the use of animal masks and the identification of a person with a wild animal (even if the persons named on the rune stones are not necessarily animal warriors).

As Gerard Breen notes: "Art and onomastics can consequently be more pertinent to our understanding of the berserkr than many later literary sources, such as the numerous, but formulaic appearances of the berserkr in the family sagas."²⁶⁹

268 According to the definition proposed by Höfler 1954, p. 53: "The primary formations are carriers of meaning like the appellatives and, like these, deserve a precise study of the history of meaning". On this concept, see also the developments in Müller 1970, p. 124 f.

269 Breen 1997, p. 5.

Summary

The aim of this study was to trace the origin, historical development and significance of the tradition of animal warriors (an. *berserkir*) in pre-Christian Scandinavian society by means of a comparative analysis of archaeological, historiographical and literary sources. In contrast to the hypercritical readings of the medieval texts, which lead to the rejection of any "cultic" interpretation of the phenomenon, this comparative source analysis makes it possible to emphasize elements of an authentic tradition beyond the literary stereotypes and to see the beast warriors in the context of beliefs and rituals that were closely linked to the customs of the Old Norse followers and the "sacral" character of early kingship.

This tradition can be traced through more or less direct evidence from the Vendel to the Viking Age. It probably had older roots, but these cannot be reconstructed with any accuracy due to the state of the sources.

In the Old Norse sources, the animal warriors are usually to as *berserkir*, although this term can refer to very different figures depending on the literary context. The etymological interpretation of the name is most likely to be based on an etymon **ber-* (*ursus*),¹ so that the Old Norse form *ber-serkr* has a similar construction to the compound *úlf-heðinn* - an appellative used in 9th-century Skaldic poetry to refer to a group of beast warriors in the service of King Harald of Norway.²

The term *ber-serkr*, which probably originated in the Younger Norse period, seems to have taken on the general meaning of animal warrior very early on, without denoting a specific type of equipment or fur (in Old Norse, incidentally, the etymon **ber* was replaced by the form *björn* to denote the bear). The word is not found outside the Scandinavian world. It appears neither in the other Germanic languages nor in the runic inscriptions, nor in the medieval sources that deal with the Viking voyages to the West.³ It is probably an originally Norwegian word, which is the local variant of a phenomenon called

1 See Chapter II above.

2 See Chapters III and IV above.

3 The Carolingian sources emphasize the extreme savagery of the Scandinavian invasions - especially Alcuin, who writes about the attack on Lindisfarne: *nunquam talis terror prius apparuit in Britannia* (Christensen / Nielsen 1975, p. 4). The brutality of the Norse warriors cannot in fact be denied, even if it becomes a topos in the Frankish sources. Nevertheless, these sources do not allow the presence - however probable - of animal warriors among the Vikings who invaded the British Isles or the continent to be established with certainty,

The customs of the animal warriors in fact refer to traditions of war and faith that were widespread in much of the Germanic world (as evidenced by eponymological⁴ and archaeological material⁵ and medieval historiography).⁶ The phenomenon seems to have persisted longer in Scandinavia than elsewhere, which is due to the relatively late establishment of Christianity in these regions.⁽⁷⁾

Snorri Sturluson mentions the connection between the berserkers and the Óðinn cult. These men devote themselves to battle under the aegis of the god of the dead - an angry god and experienced magician who has mastered the art of transformation⁸. As companions and followers of the one-eyed god, the beast warriors move between two worlds - that of mortals and the afterlife. In the ancient North, certain people were said to have the ability turn their "second self" outwards: The soul is understood as an entity capable of appearing in a clearly perceptible form (an. *hamr*).⁹ The Berserker express this ability, which itself in their frenzy, but also by dressing themselves in the fur of the animal with which they identify. Their ferocity is indeed comparable to that of a wild animal: overcome by the *berserksgangr*, they become similar to bears or wolves.

With the exception of some legendary sources and texts influenced by continental courtly literature, this transformation is not seen as a complete metamorphosis of the whole body - an ability reserved for people who know magic (cf. the adjective *ffjolkunnigr*, among others) - but as an essentially psychological phenomenon. It is a "change

to be confirmed. The vocabulary used by the medieval chroniclers is too vague to support this thesis - which is not surprising, as there was no common term to describe this type of warrior throughout Scandinavia during the Viking Age (just as there no common term for followers in the Germanic languages, for which the names varied according to time and region). On the subject of the 'barbarian north' in Carolingian sources, see Mohr 2005 and Fraesdorff 2009, among others. It should be noted that various types of monsters are associated with the north in medieval literature, such as the dog-headed ones (see above all the remarks by Bauduin 2009, p. 360). The Christian authors thus like to ascribe the character traits of "dogs" to the "heathens" (cf. Dillmann 2001 and Bühner-Thierry 2002). In an Arabic report to a Jewish trader from the late 10th century, the inhabitants of Haithabu are described with the following words: "on ne saurait entendre plus vilain chant que les grognements qui s'échappent de leurs gosiers et passent peut-être en sauvagerie les cris des chiens" (quoted from Miquel 1966, pp. 1048-1064; cf. also Jacob 1927).

4 Cf. Müller 1970, *passim*.

5 Cf. the material examined in Chapter IX.

6 Cf. For example, the Lombard dog-headed men described Paulus Diaconus.

7 See above Ch. VIII on the intervention of Þórir hundr on the battlefield of Stiklastaðir.

8 See section VI above.

9 See Chapters V and VII above.

mental state" and not a type of illness, as Frederik Grøn believed. Since the 18th century, some researchers have also tried to explain this tradition through the use of intoxicants. However, this hypothesis cannot be verified on the basis of the Old Norse sources. In the context of Óðinn mythology, a numinous dimension can be attributed to the behavior of the animal warriors.

On the battlefield, the berserkers are at the forefront of the order of battle. They have a reputation for becoming invulnerable to iron and weapons during their fits of rage (an. *berserksgangr*) - a well-known consequence of trance states.

The *berserksgangr* is by the fact that it cannot be suppressed. The frenzy is not triggered by "shamanistic" methods, but arises from individual or inherited dispositions.

In pre-Christian times, the berserkers formed the elite of the royal retinue, within which they formed a separate group due to their sometimes uncontrollable behavior and their connection to divine powers. Two types of recruits belong to this core group: On the one hand, young nobles who enter the service of a ruler during the first years of their "Viking career" (such as Kveld-Úlfr, grandfather of the skald Egill), but also warriors who probably come from a simpler social class and spend their entire lives as retainers. This organization is reminiscent of the structure of the *comitatus* described in the *Germania*, in which the young men of the social elite are not ashamed to belong to the "companions" (*nec rubor inter comites adspici*).¹⁰ The aspect of "initiation" expressed in this context does not necessarily concern the education of an age class, as Lily Weiser-Aall suggests. It is probably much more about admission rites: The applicant must show his worth by fending off attacks from the group he wishes to join during a real or simulated fight.¹¹

The presence of berserkers in the vicinity of a leader supports the sacral character of his rule. The traditions of the martial aristocracy the mythical notion of the afterlife: the king sits in the hall surrounded by his best warriors, just as the god of war is surrounded by his *einherjar* in Valhalla. The berserkers play the same role at the side of the ruler, who seen as a protégé Óðinn, as the *einherjar* play at the side of the ruler of Asgard. The cult thus becomes a dramaturgical expression of the myth and takes the form of a communal experience ("embodied

¹⁰ *Germania*, XIII, p. 78 f.

¹¹ In earlier times, this could also be the form of a fight against a wild animal (cf. the tradition of Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, XXXI, V) or a sacrifice could be part of the ceremony (as in the case of Bǫðvarr Bjarki in the *Hrólfs saga kraka*).

myths", "dramatized myths").¹²At the head of their animal warriors, the kings and Jarle express their loyalty to the divine ancestor, whose descendants they consider themselves to be. Dumézil emphasizes: "Odinn est le chef des dieux: leur premier roi, on l'a vu dans les narrations historicisantes qui le font vivre et mourir sur cette terre; leur seul roi jusqu'à la fin des temps dans la mythologie et, par conséquent, le dieu particulier des rois humains et le protecteur de leur puissance . . . ; le dieu aussi qui, parfois, réclame leur sang en sacrifice, car c'est à lui qu'on voit que uniquement "offrir" les rois dont la vertu ne suffit plus à faire prospérer les moissons."¹³This close connection between the lordly functions and the fertility of the earth is echoed in the cult of the dead: the appearance of the ancestors has an inherent fertile power; the sacrifices in the middle of winter in the Nordic religion are aimed in particular at ensuring a peaceful and fertile year. Since the berserkers of Old Norse literature particularly active during the *jól* festivities, this tradition can perhaps be linked to the tradition of cult processions postulated by Otto Höfler, which are supposed to represent the passage of the army of the dead on earth during certain nights of the year. Even if the wearing of animal masks in most archaic societies refers to magical-religious traditions with making contact with the afterlife, the Germanic model of the time still retains a certain originality due to its warlike character and close connection to sacral kingship. Through the tradition of the animal warriors, a tradition that dates back to Indo-European times survives into a relatively late period - the legacy of the warrior men's societies, which played an important role in the dissemination of myths and rites in connection with the function of the ruler.

However, the theme of warlike frenzy - one of the favorite motifs of epic poetry throughout the Indo-European world: The warrior gripped by battle frenzy is compared to a wild animal.

Beyond the literary character of these animalistic metaphors, the phenomenon of warlike frenzy, the *furor heroicus*,¹⁴belongs to a tradition deeply rooted in the archaic worldview of ancient cultures, which succinctly illustrates the close connection between war and the sphere of numinous forces. This tradition manifests itself in the customs and rituals peculiar certain groups of warriors, with

¹² Höfler 1973a, p. 98.

¹³ Dumézil 1959, p. 40 f.

¹⁴ This expression is reminiscent of the *furor teutonicus* of antiquity, which is mentioned for the first time by Lucanus (*Pharsalia*, I, 255 f.) (cf. Dümmler 1897; Trzaska-Richter 1991; Timpe 1991).

which anthropologists like to associate with the terms "male unions", "age groups",⁽¹⁵⁾ "rites of passage"¹⁶ and "martial initiation".

This particular form of warrior allegiance, which presumably played a decisive role in the expansion of many Indo-European peoples,¹⁷ is characterized in particular by the choice of theriophoric self- and group names, which are reminiscent of the appearance and behaviour of a wild animal, as well as by the wearing of animal furs and zoomorphic masks.

Ancient and medieval sources confirm the existence of this phenomenon among the Indo-Aryans,¹⁸ Persians,¹⁹ Scythians⁽²⁰⁾ Dacians,²¹ Balts, Slavs²² and Greeks,²³ the Italic peoples²⁴ and the Celts,²⁵ among whom organized warrior units played a particularly important role.

Among the Germanic tribes, the following must be regarded as one of the most dynamic carriers of this tradition, at least until the demise of paganism.²⁶ The berserkers represent one of the last manifestations of this phenomenon before the following developed in a direction that could be reconciled with the customs of the Christian West. Around the year 1000, the old customs of the "men of Óðinn" no longer find a place in the *hirð* of the Scandinavian rulers who have converted to the new religion. Christianity, however, knows how to use the martial values of the *comitatus* to its advantage by placing the military allegiance and its "culture of honor" at the service of another faith.²⁷

15 Cf. Schurtz 1902; Clemen 1938; Geissler 1973.

16 Cf. van Gennep 1909.

17 For a complete overview of the Indo-European male alliances, see Przyłuski 1940; Hasenfratz 1982; Dumézil 1985; Kershaw 2000; Speidel 2002; Sergeant 2003.

18 Cf. Wikander 1938; Bollée 1981.

19 Cf. Widengren 1938, pp. 311-351; Widengren 1969; Alföldi 1951.

20 Cf. Ivančič 1993.

21 Cf. Eliade 1959.

22 Cf. Jakobson / Simmons 1949; Jakobson / Ruzicic 1950; Kretzenbacher 1968; Ridley 1976.

23 Gernet 1936; Jeanmaire 1939; Lincoln 1975 (contra: Dumézil 1983); Gershenson 1992; Briquel 1995; Sauzeau 2003; Burkert 2008, pp. 98-108; Vidal-Naquet 2005.

24 Dumézil 1942; Alföldi 1974; Bremmer 1982; von Cierninski 2002.

25 On the significance of dog and wolf symbolism in the martial traditions of the Celtic world see, among others, Puhvel 1968; McCone 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 2002; West 1997; Birkhan 1999 and 2006; Rübkeil, 2002a; Peralta Labrador 2003, p. 168 f., van Zanten 2007.

26 Some of the groups described by Tacitus - such as the Harii (*Germania*, XLIII) or certain warriors among the Chatti (*Germania*, XXXI) - are possibly of early forms of this warrior community, united by their faith. This is at least the theory put forward by Weiser-Aall and Höfler at the time. On this controversial question, see Weiser-Aall 1932, Heizmann 2002b and the very moderate viewpoint of Meier 1999 and 2001. In contrast: Lund / Mateeva 1997.

27 This is in the 13th century by the chapters devoted to *hirð* in *Konungs skuggsjá*, chap. XXV f. (Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1920).

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Register of sites

Ammtmansnes (rock carvings) 286

Benty Grange (helmet) 254

Birka (silver figure) 257,

292 Björnhovda →

Torslunda

Chaouilley (ring sword) 274, 282

Ekhammar (bronze figures) 11, 146, 257, 268,
292-293

Fen Drayton (pressed sheet) 46, 57, 105, 263,
265, 291

Finglesham (belt buckle) 11, 137, 257

Färjestaden (gold collar) 256

Gallehus (golden horns) 11, 146, 197, 288-290

Gamla Uppsala (central town) 166, 256

Gokstad (ship) 109

Grevensvænge (bronze figures) 288

Gudme (central town) 33, 166, 251, 284

Gåshopen (rock carvings) 286

Gutenstein (sword scabbard) 11, 28, 46, 57, 60,
85, 89, 105, 245, 261, 263-272, 282-283,
285, 291, 295

Haithabu (masks) 11, 67, 296-297

Helgö (central town) 166, 274

Helgö (amulet rings) 274, 282

Högom (textile fragments) 252

Kalleby → Tanum

Kivik (gravestone) 286

Kvalsund (ship) 109

Kösching (Ringschwert) 275

Krefeld-Gellep (Ringschwert) 274

Lejre (central town) 166

Littleby → Tanum

Lärbo Tängelgård (picture stone) 270

Lewis (chess pieces) 135, 200, 298

Nydam (ship) 109

Obrigheim (pressed sheet) 28, 48, 57, 60, 85, 89,
105, 245, 261, 263, 265, 267-272,
282-283, 285, 291, 295

Oseberg (ship) 109, 293

Oseberg (tapestry fragments) 11, 137, 146,
257, 268, 293-295

Peter's finger (ring sword) 274

Schretzheim (ring sword) 275

Snartemo (ring sword) 273

Muld variety (central location) 166

Sturkö (ring sword) 273-274

Sutton Hoo (bag fitting) 252

Sutton Hoo (helmet) 11, 130, 137, 197,
257-258, 260

Sutton Hoo (shield) 281, 283

Sutton Hoo (Regalia) 281

Tanum (rock carvings) 286-288

Tissø (central town) 166

Torslunda (matrices) 11, 28, 33-34, 46, 57,
60-61, 67, 85, 89, 105, 137, 146, 156, 164,
176, 197, 250, 252-257, 259, 261-265,
267-273, 283, 285, 293-295, 305

Trajan's Column 58, 289, 291-292

Uppåkra (central town) 166

Valsgärde (boat burial ground) 278, 281

Valsgärde VII (Helm) 11, 137, 252, 254-255,
257-259, 268, 272-273

Valsgärde VII (ring sword) 273, 275, 281

Valsgärde VII (drinking horn) 281, 283

Vendel (boat burial ground) 278, 281

Vendel I (helmet) 11, 253-255

Vendel I (ring sword) 273, 275

Vendel XI (ring sword) 273, 275

Vendel XIV (helmet) 85, 254-255, 270-271, 273

Viksø (Helme) 288

Väsby (ring sword) 273-274

Weltzin-A (bracteate IK 641) 289

Års-B (Bracteate IK 7) 197

Source index

Runic inscriptions

Bjudby (Sö 54, Runenstein, Södermanland)
305 Björketorp (DR 360, Runenstein, Blekinge)
299, 304
Björklinge kirka (U 1045, Runestone,
Uppland) 305
Broholm (U 920, Runenstein, Uppland)
287, 305

Gummarp (DR 358, Runenstein, Blekinge)
13, 44, 216, 298, 301-302

Himlingøje II (KJ 10, Fibule) 305
Häggeby (U 1113, runestone fragment,
Uppland) 305
Hällestad I (DR 295, Runenstein, Skåne)
279-280
Högbý gamla kyrka (Ög 81, Runenstein,
Östergötland) 281

Igelsta Kvarn (Sö 307, Runenstein,
Södermanland) 14, 46-48, 63,
305-306
Istaby (DR 359, Runestone, Blekinge) 13, 44,
216, 298-299, 301-302

Kragehul Mose (DR 195, runic inscription on
knife shaft, Funen) 56
Källby ås (Vg 55, Runenstein,
Västergötland) 296
Källby ås (Vg 56,
Runenstein,
Västergötland) 296, 298

Långtora kirka (U 799, runic inscription on
gravestone, Uppland) 13, 47

Rök (Ög 136, Runenstein, Östergötland)
56, 304-305

Sjörup (DR 279, Runenstein, Skåne) 280
Stentofen (DR 357, Runenstein, Blekinge)
13, 216, 298, 301-304
Sölvesborg (DR 356, Runenstein, Blekinge) 298

Valby (Sö 88, Runenstein, Södermanland) 300

Øster Løgum (DR 15, runic stone, Jutland) 300

Åby ägor (Sö 86, runic block,
Södermanland) 178

Old Norse and Icelandic sources

Ágrip af Noregs konunga sögum 230, 313
Ásmundar saga kappabana 93, 197, 200, 313
Atlakviða 55, 62-63, 107-108, 110, 275
Atlamál 105-109, 198

Baldrs draumar 91, 248

Barlaams saga ok Jósafats 195, 314

Bjarkamál en fornu 84, 314

Bjarkarímur 143, 145, 175-176, 314

Blómstrvalla saga 190-191, 314

Borgarþingslög - Kristinn réttir hinn forni 201,
242, 314

Bósa saga 293, 314

Bread af Þórðar sögu hreðu 180, 222, 314

Díalógar Gregors páfa 196, 314

Diplomatarium Norvegicum 195, 314

Droplaugarsona saga 184, 314

Edda (Song Edda) (see also *Atlakviða*,
Atlamál, *Baldrs draumar*, *Grímnismál*,
Hamðismál, *Hárbarðljóð*, *Hávamál*,
Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, *Helgakviða*
hundingsbana in fyrri, *Helgakviða*
hundingsbana 2nnor, *Hyndluljóð*,
Skírnismál, *Rígsþula*, *Vafþrúðnismál*,
Völundarkviða, *Völuspá*, *Þrymskviða*) 91,
105, 108, 110, 163, 314-315

Edda Snorra Sturlusonar (see also
Gylfaginning, *Háttatal*, *Skáldskaparmál*,
Pulur) 3, 49, 74-76, 81, 84, 103, 129, 132,
142, 157, 160-161, 164, 175-176, 186, 188,
193, 215, 246, 257, 275, 282, 288, 315

- Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* 65, 161, 203, 315
- Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 14, 18, 36, 76, 82, 91, 93-94, 96, 105, 117, 122-128, 131-135, 138-141, 144, 148-149, 161, 173-174, 177-178, 180, 184, 186, 191, 198-199, 203-206, 208-211, 213, 219-221, 223, 243, 285, 315
- Eiðsifapingslög - Kristinn réttir hinn forni* 242, 315
- Eiríksmál* 78, 143, 150, 155, 315
- Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 165, 230, 235, 241-242, 244, 247, 315
- Eyrbyggja saga* 113-114, 127, 139, 141, 147, 170-171, 173-174, 183, 186, 204, 209-210, 221-222, 246, 280, 285, 316
- Fagrskinna* 4-5, 63, 74-75, 77, 82-88, 90-92, 94-95, 97-101, 103, 106, 117-118, 230, 316
- Finnboga saga* 220-222, 316
- Flateyjarbók* 4-5, 48, 63, 74, 76-77, 79, 82, 87, 92, 99-101, 103, 117, 141, 165, 222, 230-231, 239-240, 316
- Fijótsdæla saga* 127, 209, 316
- Flóamanna saga* 184, 219, 316
- Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans* 93, 316
- Fornkonunga saga* (see also *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*) 179, 249, 294, 299, 317
- Fóstbrœðra saga* 201, 317
- Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum* 219, 317
- Frisianus (Codex)* 1, 76, 98, 125, 154, 317
- Gautreks saga* 49, 178, 317
- Geisli* 230, 317
- Gísla saga Súrssonar* 129, 184, 204, 317
- Glælognskviða* 230, 317
- Gráfeldardrápa* 258
- Grágás* 14, 211, 246, 317
- Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 43, 45, 82-83, 93-94, 105, 111, 114, 117, 121-122, 126, 135, 140, 149, 163, 177, 180, 182-184, 197, 199, 204-205, 243, 246, 248, 261, 317
- Grettisrímur* 48, 317
- Grimnismál* 130, 150, 162-163, 188, 207, 248-249
- Gríms saga loðinkinna* 111, 114, 185, 206, 246, 318
- Griplur* 48, 318
- Guðmundar saga biskups* 50, 318
- Gull-Þóris saga* (see also *Þorskirðinga saga*) 172, 219, 223, 318
- Gunnars saga keldugnúpsfífls* 93, 197, 224, 318
- Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 51, 182, 318
- Gylfaginning* 76, 103, 123, 135, 150, 160, 162-164, 192, 196, 246, 257, 282, 288, 318
- Göngu-Hrólfs saga* 51, 93, 142, 179, 192, 198, 201, 203-204, 206, 318
- Hákonar saga góða* 6, 51, 155, 240, 248, 318
- Hákonarkviða* 275
- Hákonarmál* 51, 59, 78, 150, 155, 273, 291, 316, 318
- Háleygjatal* 61, 90, 156, 164, 261-263, 285, 316, 318
- Hálfðanar saga brúnufóstra* 191, 318
- Hálfðanar saga svarta* 14, 95, 125, 164, 177, 186, 319
- Hálfðanar þáttir svarta* 149, 163, 319
- Hálfs saga ok hálfrekka* 301, 319
- Hamðismál* 110, 162
- Harald's saga harðráða* 51, 319
- Haralds saga hárfagra* 4, 6, 14, 76, 79, 91, 94-98, 118, 122, 125-126, 155, 164, 180, 233, 243, 319
- Harald's þáttir hárfagra* 4-5, 48, 79, 91, 100-101, 319
- Haraldskvæði* 4-5, 8, 11, 18, 35, 43, 47-48, 54-55, 60-63, 65-71, 73-83, 85, 87, 90, 92, 102-111, 113, 115, 118-119, 121, 135, 137, 146, 155, 164, 193, 196, 198, 236, 243-246, 261, 278, 284, 292, 305, 319
- Hárbardljóð* 111-114, 193, 246, 285
- Harðar saga* 132, 162, 192, 219-220, 223, 319
- Hátta Valley* 78, 176, 275, 319
- Hauks þáttir hábrókar* 86, 132, 319-320
- Hauksbók* 76, 202, 320
- Haustlög* 76
- Hávamál* 2, 136, 162-163, 186, 200, 205, 249, 320
- Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* 203, 220, 320
- Hector's saga* 93, 190-191, 197, 200, 204, 320
- Heiðarvíga saga* 139, 170, 174, 208-209, 219, 320
- Heiðreks saga* (see also *Hervarar saga*) 93, 108, 112-113, 131, 151, 177, 185, 192, 197, 200, 203, 211, 215, 280, 293, 320
- Heimskringla* (see also *Ynglinga saga*, *Hálfðanar saga svarta*, *Haralds saga*)

- hárfagra, Hákonar saga góða, Óláfs saga helga, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, Magnúss saga góða, Haralds saga harðráða* 1, 4-6, 14, 22, 59, 74-77, 79, 82, 90, 92, 94-95, 97-99, 101, 103, 117-118, 121, 125-126, 144, 153, 155, 161, 164-165, 182, 186, 190, 193, 196, 227, 231, 233-235, 237-241, 244, 247-248, 261, 277, 320
- Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 275, 282
- Helgakviða hundingsbana in fyrri* 150, 249, 299
- Helgakviða hundingsbana önnor* 249, 299
- Hervarar saga* (see also *Heiðreks saga*) 22, 49, 59, 200, 320
- Hirðskrá* 124, 278, 320
- Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvis* 93, 191-192, 320
- Hómiljubók* 230, 321
- Hrings rimur ok Tryggva (Geðraunir)* 93, 321
- Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* 51, 179, 185, 201, 204, 207, 211, 321
- Hrólfs saga kraka* 14, 53, 57, 129, 142-145, 163, 175-178, 187-188, 202-203, 206-207, 227, 309, 321
- Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* 93, 172, 197, 253, 321
- Hyndluljóð* 111-112, 114, 246, 249, 299
- Hænsa-Þóris saga* 221, 321
- Höfuðlausn* 275
- Íslendinga drápa* 112-114, 246, 319, 321
- Íslendingabók* 3, 321
- Ívens saga* 120, 194, 321
- Jarlmanns saga ok Hermanns* 191, 321
- Jónsvíkinga saga* 185-186, 261, 321
- Jónsbók* 203, 322
- Karlamagnús saga* 195, 247, 322
- Ketils saga hængs* 49, 61, 161, 204-205, 322
- Knýtlinga saga* 61, 280, 322
- Konungs skuggsjá* 311, 322
- Kormák's saga* 219, 322
- Krákumál* 271, 322
- Kristni saga* 22, 50, 93, 120, 190, 197, 208, 322
- Kristniþóð Þangbrands (Kristni þáttur)* 190, 323
- Landnámabók* 27, 35, 54, 128, 132, 139, 141, 146, 171, 174, 202, 208, 213, 218-219, 221-222, 297, 323
- Magnúss saga góða* 51, 165, 190, 247, 323
- Mírmants saga* 190, 323
- Morkinskinna* 230, 323
- Nesjavísur* 84, 230, 323, 325
- Njáls saga* 52, 130, 190, 204, 208, 323
- Óláfsríma Haraldssonar* 240, 315, 323
- Óláfs saga helga* (Hkr) 67, 98, 118-119, 121, 126, 144-145, 165, 174-175, 180, 183, 190, 226-227, 230-237, 239-241, 244, 277, 323
- Óláfs saga helga* (Flat) 67, 165, 174-175, 180, 183, 226, 230, 235, 239-240, 323
- Óláfs saga helga* (The Oldest Saga) 230, 323
- Óláfs saga helga* (Snorri's independentsaga) 67, 174, 183, 226, 230-231, 240, 324
- Óláfs saga helga* (The Legendary Saga) 67, 86, 118-119, 129, 157, 165, 174-175, 178, 180, 190, 206, 216, 226, 230-231, 233, 237, 240-242, 324
- Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Hkr) 182, 228, 231, 247, 261, 324
- Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta* 52, 93, 324
- Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* 141, 213, 222, 324
- Ragnars saga loðbrókar* 206, 271, 324
- Ragnarsdrápa* 150, 276
- Ragnarssona saga* 271, 324
- Rígsþula* 92
- Sigurðar saga þögla* 192, 204, 325
- Skálda saga Haralds konungs hárfagra* 76, 99, 325
- Skáldskaparmál* 79, 102, 150, 176, 207, 227, 249, 261, 270, 282, 288, 299, 325
- Skírnismál* 302
- Skjöldunga saga* 176, 325
- Strengleikar* 28, 217, 325
- Styrbjarnar þáttur Svíakappa* 280, 326
- Svarfdæla saga* 2, 50, 127, 137, 149, 172, 177, 181, 184-185, 187, 199, 204, 207, 210, 326

Sögubrot af fornkonungum (see also *Fornkonunga saga*) 294, 317, 326
Sǫrla saga sterka 64, 219, 223, 326
Sǫrla þátr 270, 326

Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs (hins eldra) 191, 326

Úlfhams rímur (*Vargstökkur*) 220, 326
Úlfhams saga 24, 220, 326

Vatnsdæla saga 2, 43, 45, 55, 62, 82-83, 86, 91, 93-94, 97, 105, 117-121, 135, 138, 147, 183, 189, 194, 197, 199, 204-205, 208, 211, 219-220, 239, 243, 246, 261, 326
Vafþrúðnismál 150, 217
Viðbætur við Óláfs sögu hins helga 240, 326
Viga-Glúms saga 59, 129, 177, 185, 187-188, 326
Víkingarvísur 230, 325-327
Viktors saga ok Blávus 93, 142, 197, 200, 204, 327
Völsunga saga 14, 142-143, 189, 198, 203, 217-218, 224, 293-294, 327
Völundarkviða 55-56, 62-63, 217
Völuspá 257

Ynglinga saga 1-4, 6, 14, 18, 36, 50-51, 57, 70, 76, 95, 119, 123, 134, 136, 138, 143, 146-148, 150-151, 153-155, 163-164, 170, 176-177, 186, 188, 196, 199, 202, 204-206, 208, 218, 248-249, 261, 272, 285, 299, 327
Ynglinga Valley 3, 76, 98-99, 299

Þiðriks saga af Bern 249, 327
Þorsfirðinga saga (see also *Gull-Þóris saga*) 224, 318
Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar 49, 179, 203-204, 327
Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns 151, 215, 305, 327
Þorvalds þátr víðfjara 93, 120, 190, 194, 208, 327
Þrymskviða 217
Þulur 49, 75, 162-164, 275, 327

Þrvar-Odds saga 64, 66, 93, 111-114, 162, 177, 198, 201-202, 246, 305, 327

Sources in Latin

Acta sancti Olavi regis et martyris 230, 328
Ad catalogum regum Sveciæ annotanda 50, 151, 184, 328
 Adam of Bremen→ *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*
 Ammianus Marcellinus→ *Res gestae*
 Arngrímur Jónsson→ *Ad catalogum regum Sveciæ annotanda*
 Arngrímur Jónsson→ *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta*

Beda Venerabilis→ *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*

Chronicon 303
Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum 291, 300, 328

Edictum Pistense 92, 278, 328
Epitoma rei militaris 49, 135-136, 328, 330

Formulae Markulfi 278, 328

Germania 8, 18, 30, 33, 49, 66, 84, 91, 135-136, 150, 173, 185, 189, 197, 209, 258-260, 276-277, 281, 283, 285, 309, 311, 328, 330
Gesta Danorum 8, 14, 68, 89, 129, 131, 143-145, 151, 176, 178, 180, 186-189, 197-198, 200, 203-207, 227, 233, 248-249, 260, 270-271, 280, 284, 293-294, 305, 328, 330
Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum 157, 230, 282, 303, 328-329
Gesta Normannorum ducum 228, 329

Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiesium 228, 230, 240, 329-330
Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus 140, 144, 160, 329
Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum 249, 258, 328-329
Historia Langobardorum 30, 91, 160, 203, 227-228, 258, 291, 308, 329-330
Historia naturalis 159, 300

Historia Norwegiae 230, 233, 329
Historia Romana (Velleius Paterculus) 228,
 329-330
Historiae (Tacitus) 8, 51, 91, 155, 260, 291-292,
 329-330

Lucanus → *Pharsalia*

Nivard of Ghent → *Ysengrimus Notitia
 Dignitatum* 257

Olaus Magnus → *Historia de gentibus
 septentrionalibus*
Opus imperfectum in Matthaeum 44, 330
Opuscula historica 187, 330
Origo et gesta Sivardi 144, 330

Passio et miracula beati Olavi 228, 230, 330
Passio Sancti Sigismundi regis 300, 330
 Paulus Diaconus → *Historia Langobardorum
 Pharsalia* 310, 329-330
 Pliny the Elder → *Historia naturalis*

Rerum Danicarum fragmenta 176, 186,
 328, 330
Res gestae 30, 49, 135, 189, 309,
 328, 330

Saxo Grammaticus → *Gesta Danorum*
 Sven Aggesen → *Opuscula historica*

Tacitus → *Germania*
 Tacitus → *Historiae*
 Theodoricus monachus → *Historia de
 antiquitate regum
 Norwagiensium*
 Thietmar of Merseburg → *Chronicon*

Vegetius → *Epitoma rei militaris*
 Velleius Paterculus → *Historia Romana*

Ysengrimus 130, 329-330

Sources in ancient Greek

Anabasis 198, 331

Cassius Dio → *Historia Romana*

De bellis 54, 189, 331
De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae 156, 181,
 197, 331
De officiis 197, 331

Geographica 159, 260

Helládos Periēgēsis 159, 209
 Herodotus → *Histories*
Historia Romana (Cassius Dio) 258, 331
Historiai (Polybios) 292, 331
Histories (Herodotus) 159, 209

Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos → *De
 ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*

Pausanias → *Helládos Periēgēsis*
 Plato → *Politeia* Plutarch
 → *Vitae parallelae Politeia* 159
 Polybios → *Historíai*
 Prokopios of Caesarea → *De bellis*
 Pseudo-Kodinos → *De officiis*

Strabon → *Geographika*

Vitae parallelae 292, 331

Xenophon → *Anabasis*

Old English sources

Anglo-Saxon Chronicles 187, 332

Beowulf 176, 249, 275-276, 293, 299, 332

Deor 151, 332

Widsith 110, 151, 160, 176, 249, 299, 332

Old and Middle High German sources

Biterolf 249, 332

Kudrun 150, 270, 332

Lamprechts Alexander 270, 332

Song of the Nibelungs 107-109, 332

Wolfdietrich 249, 332

Sources in Old French

Ivain 120, 194, 332

Lais of Marie de France 28, 217, 332-333

Old Irish sources

Táin Bó Cúailnge 160, 333

Sanskrit sources

Ṛgveda 159, 333